

Q: What are you doing to help countries with inadequate health legislation?

A: We are in the process of formulating model legislation which countries can adapt to help them achieve the Millennium Development Goals. Many countries revise public health legislation and many never do. There are some former colonies whose health legislation probably dates back to colonial times. It doesn't mean this is obsolete, most likely not, but sometimes it needs to be brought up to date. Furthermore, we have collected existing legislation from many countries, so we can provide Member States with examples of existing laws.

Q: What simple, cost-effective interventions could make environments substantially healthier and food much safer?

A: There's one — and it's something that often gets short shrift when there is an outbreak of infectious disease — and that's hygiene. Hygiene can carry us a long way. Hygiene is written into the WHO constitution. We have developed the Five Keys to Safer Food, consisting of five very simple principles of hygiene.

I don't know if it takes care of 30% or 50% of health-related problems, but it's a big step and something that can be done easily.

Q: What are you doing to improve hygiene standards?

A: Probably not enough. With regard to avian flu, in particular on small farms, there could be room for us — under the heading of occupational health — to develop guidance on hygiene standards and methods to handle poultry. We have been much more focused on the virus that causes it, and this is important work, but most people who died were at these small farms.

Q: When people are faced with a daily struggle for survival are ethics a luxury they can ill afford?

A: In public health, ethics are particularly important when you work under

constraints. We developed a set of ethical guidelines for the '3 by 5' campaign, to get HIV/AIDS treatment to one in two poor people who need it. For example, a doctor or a nurse in a rural clinic has one HIV/AIDS treatment left. In comes a poor farmer and in comes the local teacher. Whom do you treat? Without ethical guidance medical personnel are exposed to the pulls and pushes of the situation. The teacher may be more important to the community but may get treatment by other means. If the farmer dies, a whole family will be thrown into destitution. We have also discussed the ethical dimensions of organ and tissue transplant over the last two years as well as transplantation tourism. Ethics are not a luxury, it's quite the opposite. It's in situations where you have very limited choices that you need to know how to make the right decision. ■

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Recent news from WHO

- WHO warned that young people should avoid excessive exposure to the sun and avoid using sunlamps to get a tan. The **17 March** warning was directed primarily at under-18s who have a greater risk of developing malignant melanoma later in life if they get burnt from exposure to ultraviolet (UV) radiation from the sun or a sunlamp.
- The fight against tuberculosis (TB) has made progress across most regions of the world with the glaring exception of Africa, where the disease has reached alarming proportions and where a growing number of cases and deaths are linked to HIV/AIDS, according to a new report. The Global Tuberculosis Control report, released by WHO on World TB Day on **24 March**, found that global prevalence of the disease has declined by more than 20% since 1990 and that incidences are falling or stable in five of the six regions of the world. In contrast, TB rates in Africa have tripled since 1990 in countries with high HIV/AIDS prevalence and rising across the continent at a rate of 3–4% annually. Read the report: http://www.who.int/tb/publications/global_report/en/
- Damage to ecosystems poses a growing threat to human health, according to a new WHO report published on **30 March**. According to the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment some 60% of the benefits that the global ecosystem provides to support life on Earth — such as fresh water, clean air and a relatively stable climate — are being degraded or used in an unsustainable way. An ecosystem is a dynamic complex of plants, animals, and microorganisms that interact with the non-living environment. Read the report: <http://www.maweb.org/>
- In a major report published on **7 April**, WHO called on governments and donors to do more to save the lives of millions of mothers and children who die every year from preventable causes in poor countries. *The World health report 2005: Make every mother and child count* said millions of women and children die because they do not have access to potentially life-saving care.
- WHO launched an appeal through the United Nations on **8 April** for US\$ 2.4 million to help Angola fight a major outbreak of Marburg haemorrhagic fever. Over 200 cases have been reported. More than 50 international health experts from the global alert and response network are managing the outbreak alongside Angolan health teams. Their work was suspended briefly in Uige Province — the epicentre of the outbreak — on **7 April** after reported stoning of vehicles by residents. The following day work resumed as WHO engaged community leaders to help explain the serious nature of the virus to residents.
- Government officials, HIV/AIDS and nutrition experts, and researchers and representatives of UN and nongovernmental organizations gathered in the South African city of Durban from **10–13 April** to examine the relationship between nutrition and HIV/AIDS. HIV infection and malnutrition rates are rising to alarming levels in sub-Saharan Africa.
- WHO said on **13 April** no infections of laboratory workers with the H2N2 influenza virus had been reported after the College of American Pathologists distributed samples to 3747 laboratories in 18 countries in March. People born after 1968 are expected to have limited immunity to the virus because it has not circulated in nature since then.

For more about these and other WHO news items please see: <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/en/>