

Public health round-up

Better tests urgently needed



WHO/Dominic Chavez

This girl is being examined as part of WHO efforts to study multidrug-resistant tuberculosis (TB) programmes in Manila in the Philippines. Paediatric TB experts will meet in Stockholm this month to highlight the research gaps and challenges in childhood TB control. The Childhood Tuberculosis Meeting on 17–18 March has been organized by the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control together with the Stop TB Partnership.

Of the estimated 9 million new cases of TB each year, at least 10–15% occur in children.

Luis E Cuevas, a scientist from the diagnostics team at the Special Programme for Research and Training in Tropical Diseases (TDR), is one of many TB experts calling for urgent research to find new diagnostics for TB

in children. "In high-burden settings, up to 30% of TB cases occur in children and yet the problem is neglected because most diagnostic tests are not designed for children", he says. Children have received a lower priority than adults in TB control efforts because they are considered less infectious and are more difficult to diagnose. This year's World TB Day on 24 March aims to inspire innovation in TB research and care with its campaign, On the move against tuberculosis. More information on World TB Day available from: http://www.stoptb.org/events/world_tb_day/2011

Environmental cancer

The world's first International Conference on Environmental and Occupational Determinants of Cancer will be held in Spain on 17–18 March. Around 19% of all cancers are caused by environmental and workplace factors, including exposure to air pollution, ultraviolet light and asbestos, which contribute to 1.3 million deaths every year. "This conference will address the environmental and occupational determinants of cancer that are responsible for hundreds of thousands of deaths each year," says Maria Neira, WHO Director for Public Health and Environment.

World immunization week

For the first time, countries in the WHO regions of Africa, the Americas, Eastern Mediterranean, Europe and the Western Pacific will host simultaneous immunization weeks. From 23 April, activities will include training sessions, media events and large-scale vaccination campaigns. Immunization is estimated to prevent between 2 and 3 million deaths each year and is one of the most cost-effective health investments.

Strengthening the partnership

The WHO Executive Board has voted to accept the Cochrane Collaboration as a nongovernmental organization in official relations with WHO, formalizing the strong relationship between the two organizations. The Cochrane Collaboration is an international network of more than 28 000 contributors that make up-to-date, accurate information about the effects of health care available. "The Cochrane Collaboration provides an international benchmark for the independent assessment and assimilation of scientific evidence. It is a leading producer of high quality systematic reviews in health care," says Marie-Paule Kieny, Assistant Director General, Innovation Information, Evidence and Research at WHO. Current work between the Cochrane Collaboration and WHO includes the development of the WHO Library of Evidence for Nutrition Actions (eLENA).

Selling statistics

Hans Rosling is taking his message to the people in a recent television documentary entitled *The Joy of Stats*. The programme was broadcast on BBC Four in December 2010

and January this year. Rosling has worked closely with WHO on making health statistics more accessible and user-friendly with such projects as Gapminder, which claims to be "a modern museum on the Internet". Find out more about his work at: <http://www.gapminder.org>

Beat cancer with sport

Two and a half hours a week of moderate physical activity can reduce the risk of breast and colon cancers, according to WHO's new Global Recommendations on Physical Activity for Health released on 4 February on World Cancer Day. "Physical activity has a strong role to play in reducing the incidence of certain cancers," says Ala Alwan, WHO's Assistant Director-General for Noncommunicable Diseases and Mental Health. In 2008, almost 460 000 women died from breast cancer, while close to 610 000 men and women died from colorectal cancer. Research published last month in the journal, *Obesity*, adds to the evidence underlying these recommendations with the finding that unfit obese women had significantly higher cancer rates than fit women of normal weight.

Access this article at: <http://www.nature.com/oby/journal/vaop/ncurrent/pdf/oby2010345a.pdf>

Adolescent boom

With the world's population expected to reach seven billion later this year, the new United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) executive director has pledged to focus on the largest global youth generation ever. "UNFPA will place a special emphasis on today's large generation of young people," Babatunde Osotimehin, a former Nigerian health minister with wide experience of HIV/AIDS control, said last month in his first address to the UNFPA Executive Board. There are an estimated 1.8 billion adolescents and youth in the world today, accounting for nearly one third of the world's population, with almost 90% living in developing countries. "They need increased support, and they want freedom, participation and dignity," he said.

Research scan

Fear of HIV drives change

Improved public awareness and fear of contracting the virus has led to a significant drop in HIV infections in Zimbabwe. A study, published last month in *PLoS Medicine*, has found that new HIV infections almost halved, from 29% to 16% between 1997 and

2007. The study attributes this significant drop to mass social change brought about by improved public awareness of AIDS deaths and a fear of contracting the virus. Educational programmes on changing people's attitudes to the practice of safer sex and multiple sexual partners were also important factors in reducing infection. Access the full text at: <http://www.plosmedicine.org/article/info%3Adoi%2F10.1371%2Fjournal.pmed.1000414>

Cooking with coal retards child growth

The use of indoor coal for cooking or heating may reduce growth in young children and have serious implications for health in adulthood, according to a study by Ghosh et al. published online last month in the *Archives of Paediatrics & Adolescent Medicine*. Researchers tracked 1133 children in the Czech Republic from birth to age 36 months. Children from homes that used coal were found to be around 1.3 cm shorter at age 36 months than those from households that use other sources of fuel. "Weight and length or height during infancy and childhood are considered to be predictors of morbidity such as obesity and mortality from malnutrition and infections," said the authors. Abstract available online at: <http://archpedi.ama-assn.org/cgi/content/short/archpediatrics.2010.294> ■

Looking ahead

8 March: 100 years of International Women's Day (see news item on this page). More information available from: <http://www.who.int/gender>

22 March: World Water Day. This year's theme is Water for cities: responding to the urban challenge. Events around the world include an international photography contest, a 100 km run from Vancouver to Abbotsford, Canada, to raise money for water projects in Ethiopia, and a conference in Ghana on the topic of rural access to clean water. More information available from: <http://www.worldwaterday.org>

24 March: World Tuberculosis Day (see news item on facing page). More information available from: http://www.stoptb.org/events/world_tb_day

7 April: World Health Day. This year the focus is on antimicrobial resistance. WHO will launch a worldwide campaign calling on governments and stakeholders to implement the policies and practices needed to prevent drug resistance and safeguard medicines for future generations. See news feature in this issue (pp. 168–170) and more information available from: <http://www.who.int/world-health-day>

25 April: World Malaria Day. Malaria infects more than 500 million people per year and kills about 1 million. More information available from: <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/events/annual/malaria>

28–29 April 2011: Russian Ministerial Conference on noncommunicable diseases (NCD) and healthy lifestyles. The first ministerial conference to develop and strengthen policies and programmes on healthy lifestyles and NCD prevention, in preparation for United Nations General Assembly High-level Meeting on the Prevention and Control of Noncommunicable Diseases on 19–20 September 2011. More information available from: http://www.who.int/nmh/events/moscow_ncds_2011

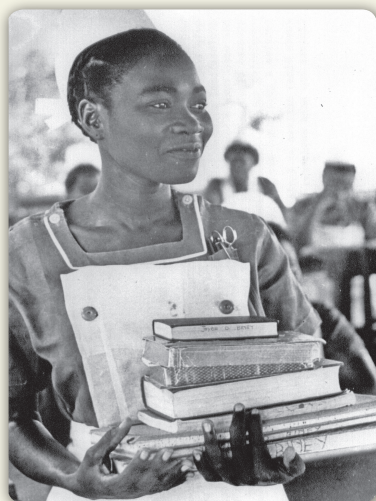
11 May: Launch of the Decade of Action for Road Safety 2011–2020. Road traffic deaths and injuries take the lives of nearly 1.3 million people every year and injure millions more. More information available from: http://www.who.int/roadsafety/decade_of_action

12 May: International Nurses Day. The International Council of Nurses marks this day with the production and distribution of the International Nurses' Day Kit. The theme for this year is Closing the gap: increasing access and equity. More information available from: <http://www.icn.ch/publications/international-nurses-day>

17–21 May: World Health Assembly.

31 May: World No Tobacco Day. The focus this year will be on the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, which is the world's first treaty negotiated for public health. More information is available from: <http://www.who.int/tobacco/wntd/2011/announcement>

Celebrating 100 years



UNICEF/Bertheim

“Women's strength, industry and wisdom are humankind's greatest untapped resource.”

Michelle Bachelet, Executive Director of UN Women

Joyce Ophelia Biney, 24, typifies the emerging professional nurse-midwife in Ghana in the 1960s. This photo from the WHO archives shows her as she was just finishing four years of training at the Korle Bu Hospital in Accra, Ghana. She continued her studies for a further 21 months of specialized work in midwifery, and later was given a government post in a rural health centre. During this period, WHO and UNICEF assisted the government of Ghana by providing equipment and personnel to help train midwives. Educating women is the theme of International Women's Day on 8 March 2011. This year marks 100 years of this celebration of women's achievements. More information about International Women's Day available from: <http://www.who.int/gender>