

Public health round-up

A new ambassador for TB and HIV



WHO/C Black

Peng Liyuan shakes hands with WHO Director-General, Dr Margaret Chan

Chinese singer, Peng Liyuan, has been appointed Goodwill Ambassador for Tuberculosis (TB) and HIV/AIDS to raise awareness of the two diseases that together claimed more than 3.5 million lives in 2009. "I hope to make a significant contribution to the great work of WHO in saving lives from TB and HIV/AIDS, and that my involvement will benefit those who are most at risk," Peng said at her inauguration ceremony at WHO headquarters in Geneva.

Save one million lives

One million lives could be saved by the end of 2015 by better integration of TB and HIV care, if countries implement a new epidemiological model. The publication that outlines this model, *Time to act: save a million lives by 2015—Prevent and treat tuberculosis among people living with HIV*, was launched on 6 June at the

United Nations High-Level Meeting on AIDS in New York. HIV and TB form a lethal combination, each speeding the other's progress. HIV weakens the immune system. TB is a leading cause of death among people who are HIV positive and, in Africa, HIV is the single most important factor contributing to the increase in the incidence of TB since 1990.

World Hepatitis Day

Hepatitis viruses kill around one million people every year and one in three people have been infected with one of the hepatitis viruses at some point in their lives. On 28 July, WHO marks its first official World Hepatitis Day to raise awareness of viral hepatitis and the diseases it causes. Hepatitis is a health problem in every country that affects every age group.

Since 1982, more than one billion doses of hepatitis B vaccine have been used worldwide. In many countries, the vaccine has reduced the rate of chronic infection among children from 15% to less than 1%.

Snapshot of world health

A child born in 2009 can expect to live for an average of 68 years, an improvement from 64 years' global life expectancy for children born in 1990, according to the *World health statistics 2011*, published in May by the World Health Organization (WHO). Based on more than 100 health indicators reported by WHO's 193 Member States and other sources, this annual report provides a snapshot of the global health situation and trends. WHO has also launched its new Global Health Observatory, a web site that serves as a one-stop shop for global health-related statistics. <http://www.who.int/gho/en/>

Cancer risk of mobile phones

An estimated five billion mobile phone users around the world may be increasing their risk of cancer, particularly glioma, a malignant type of brain cancer. Last month, 31 scientists from 14 countries met at the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) in Lyon, France, to discuss whether exposure to radiofrequency electromagnetic fields, such as heavy use of mobile phones, poses a risk to long-term health. "The evidence, while still accumulating, is strong enough to support a conclusion that...there could be some risk," says Jonathan Samet, chairman of the working group. The main conclusions from the group will be published on 1 July in *The Lancet Oncology*.

Progress in tobacco war

Since December 2008, 16 countries have introduced comprehensive bans on smoking in public places, bringing the total to 31 countries, according to the *WHO Report on the global tobacco epidemic, 2011*. This report, due to be launched on 7 July, is the third in a series that tracks the extent of tobacco use and progress on countries' introduction of tobacco control measures. The report shows good progress in the fight against the tobacco epidemic, which this year is expected to kill 6 million people.

Polio online



Courtesy of TED

Bruce Aylward from WHO

“Disease eradication is the venture capital of public health.”

Bruce Aylward

Assistant-Director General, Bruce Aylward, gives the first-ever WHO TED Talk on the worldwide effort to eradicate polio. With the theme of “ideas worth spreading,” TED is a nonprofit online community that brings together “the world’s most inspired thinkers” (<http://youtu.be/vjUtTPOswZA>). Also on polio online is the documentary “I have polio” about two Somali children who were infected with polio in 2007. Since then, Somalia has been polio-free. Watch it on WHO Somalia Youtube channel: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dut--mDk1Co>

Mobile phones for health

Mobile phones are used as an integral part of health programmes and activities in 83% of 112 countries surveyed, according to *mHealth: new horizons for health through mobile technologies*, a new report launched by WHO on 7 June. However, the majority of these projects are still in the small-scale pilot phase and only 12% of them have been evaluated. The four areas where mobile phones were most frequently used were health call centres (59%), emergency toll-free phone services (55%), management of emergencies and disasters (54%) and telemedicine (49%). <http://www.who.int/goe/en/>

Rolling out speedy TB test

WHO has published a guide for health-care workers on how to integrate a new rapid diagnostic test for TB into their work. The test – known as Xpert MTB/RIF assay – that was endorsed by WHO in December 2010 represents a major breakthrough in TB care and control as it reduces the time it takes to make an accurate diagnosis of TB and rifampicin resistance from up to three months to less than two hours. The guide entitled *Rapid implementation* includes recommendations for patient management and practical considerations for

introducing the table-top device in the field. http://whqlibdoc.who.int/publications/2011/9789241501569_eng.pdf

Commission presents findings

The United Nations Commission on Information and Accountability for Women’s and Children’s Health presented its final report *Keeping promises, measuring results* at the 64th World Health Assembly held in Geneva in May. The report proposes that 11 indicators are tracked in 74 countries with the highest burden of maternal and child mortality. It promotes strengthening of national health information systems and calls for an independent annual review of progress at both national and global levels. “Tracking resources and results of public health spending is critical for transparency, credibility and ensuring that much-needed funds are used for their intended purposes and to reach those who need them most,” said President Jakaya Kikwete, from the United Republic of Tanzania and one of the co-chairs of the Commission. Prime Minister Stephen Harper from Canada, the other co-chair of the Commission, stressed that collective efforts will ensure tangible progress, “but only if we remain fully committed to making the recommendations in this report a reality”.

Research scan

Young adults at risk

More young Americans may have high blood pressure than we think. Around 19% of American adults aged 24–32 years may have high blood pressure, according to the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health in the United States of America. These findings contrast with those of the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey, which reported high blood pressure in 4% of adults aged 20 to 39 years. The study, published online in *Epidemiology* on 25 May, found that many young people are unaware that they have high blood pressure.

Survival after weight-loss surgery

Weight-loss (bariatric) surgery, which includes gastric banding and gastric bypass, has become increasingly prescribed for people who are obese in recent years. But according to a study published in the June 15 issue of *JAMA*, bariatric surgery may not increase long-term survival among severely obese older males. The study followed 850 male bariatric surgery patients (aged 50 on average) at 12 Veterans Affairs medical centres in the USA. It found that such surgery was not significantly associated with reduced mortality in the six years following surgery. ■

Looking ahead

11 July: World Population Day <http://www.un.org/en/events/populationday>

28 July: World Hepatitis Day <http://www.worldhepatitisalliance.org/WorldHepatitisDay.aspx>

1–7 August: World Breastfeeding Week <http://worldbreastfeedingweek.org>

9 August: International Day of the World’s Indigenous People <http://www.un.org/en/events/indigenousday>

19 August: World Humanitarian Day <http://ochaonline.un.org/whd>

10 September: World Suicide Prevention Day <http://www.iasp.info/wspd>

19–23 September: United Nations Summit on Chronic Diseases (High-level Meeting of the United Nations General Assembly on the Prevention and Control of Noncommunicable Diseases) http://www.who.int/nmh/events/2011/ncd_summit

21 September: International Day of Peace <http://www.internationaldayofpeace.org>

24 September: World Heart Day <http://www.world-heart-federation.org>