

## Public health round-up

**Emergency vaccination for vulnerable children**

This child is one of 215 000 children vaccinated in an emergency campaign held in late July near Dadaab, a large settlement for Somali refugees in north-eastern Kenya. High malnutrition due to the severe drought, combined with a large influx of refugees from Somalia, is putting children at increased risk of disease. A campaign run by WHO, UNICEF and the Kenyan Ministry of Health vaccinated local children against measles and polio, as well as giving them vitamin A and deworming tablets. Watch the campaign on: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OrBj82qO4aw>.



WHO/Pieter Desloovere

nized and to identify any gaps. By early June, the ministry had collected about 26 million telephone numbers for its central registry. According to WHO statistics, only 72% of Indian babies receive the three doses of the vaccine that protect against diphtheria, tetanus and whooping cough.

**Innovations for saving lives**

About US\$ 14 million has been awarded for the development of innovations aimed at saving the lives of mothers and children around the world. “Saving lives at birth: a grand challenge for development” was launched in March to harness global ingenuity by calling for solutions to end maternal and newborn deaths and stillbirths. Several members of the Partnership for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health were among the 19 finalists. They include: Johns Hopkins University for its easy-to-use identification system for early and late preterm infants; the Population Council for its mobile clinical assessment service called Baby Monitor; and WHO for its low-cost instrument for assisted vaginal delivery. This initiative was funded by Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the United States Agency for International Development, the World Bank, the Government of Norway and Grand Challenges Canada. <http://www.who.int/pmnch>

**Technology to fight dengue**

Singaporeans are soon to get updates on dengue using social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. The National Environment Agency (NEA) plans to use social media to post up-to-the-minute information on the latest dengue clusters or high-risk areas. It will also allow the public to alert the NEA if they spot an increase in mosquitoes in their neighbourhood. The NEA is also developing mosquito-recognition software that can identify the species of mosquito from a photograph of its pupae or larvae for fast identification of breeding sites. It hopes eventually to integrate it with an iPhone application for the public to use as well.

**Warning on TB tests**

WHO is calling for a ban on inaccurate and unapproved blood tests for active tuberculosis (TB) because they often lead to misdiagnosis and mistreatment. This is the first time WHO has issued an explicit “negative” policy recommendation against a practice that is widely used in TB care. After 12 months of rigorous analysis, WHO and global experts found overwhelming evidence that these blood tests produce an unacceptable number of wrong results – both false-positives and false-negatives – compared with more accurate microscopic examinations or microbiological cultures. More than one million inaccurate blood tests are carried out each year, at a cost of up to US\$ 30 per test. “It’s a multi-million dollar business centred on selling substandard tests with unreliable results,” said Karin Weyer, coordinator of TB Diagnostics and Laboratory Strengthening for the WHO Stop TB Department.

**Nutrition online**

Malnutrition affects several billion people and kills millions – mostly young children – every year. On 10 August in Colombo, Sri Lanka, WHO launched an online initiative that aims to combat malnutrition by provid-

ing the best evidence and advice for nutrition interventions. The WHO e-Library of Evidence for Nutrition Actions (eLENA) presents the latest information to tackle the three main forms of malnutrition: undernutrition, vitamin and mineral deficiencies and overweight and obesity. <http://www.who.int/elena>

**Rotavirus vaccine in Sudan**

More than half a million children die each year from rotavirus infections, which cause gastroenteritis and diarrhoea. Sudan is the first country in Africa to introduce a rotavirus vaccine with the support of GAVI. The decision to introduce the vaccine was based on WHO-supported gastroenteritis surveillance in Sudan, which found that, from more than 9000 stool samples, 33% tested positive for rotavirus and 42% of these positive cases were among infants aged less than 8 months.

**Mobile phones for immunization**

In a bid to improve immunization coverage, the Indian Ministry of Health is collecting the mobile phone numbers of all pregnant women. The government plans to phone mothers to check whether their babies are fully immu-

## Envoy for patient safety

Every year between 4% and 16% of all hospitalized patients are harmed or die due to preventable patient safety incidents. WHO has appointed Professor Sir Liam Donaldson as Envoy for Patient Safety to help promote patient safety as a global priority. Donaldson was Chief Medical Officer for England from 1998 to 2010. "Health care has not achieved the level of safety of many other high-risk industries," he said. "Citizens of countries around the world find it incredible that errors lead to patients getting the wrong operation or the wrong medication, sometimes with fatal consequences. Lessons need to be learned from such tragedies and action taken."



Department of Health, United Kingdom

## Just published

### Protecting elderly people

Every year in the WHO European Region, at least 4 million elderly people experience maltreatment and 2500 of them die as a result. As most countries in this region have an ageing population, policy-makers are concerned about this growing problem. The *European report on preventing elder maltreatment* proposes actions that countries can take to help prevent this occurring, such as programmes designed to change attitudes towards older people.

### Noise linked with health

At least one million healthy life years are lost every year due to traffic-related noise in western Europe, according to a new publication from WHO. The *Burden of disease from environmental noise* shows the link between noise and health effects such as cardiovascular disease, cognitive impairment and sleep disturbance.

### Mercury-free health care

A WHO-supported initiative aims to help countries to get rid of polluting, mercury-based medical devices and to

substitute them with safe, affordable and accurate alternatives. The guide, *Replacement of mercury thermometers and sphygmomanometers in health care*, provides step-by-step instructions.

### Empower women for health

Lack of progress in Millennium Development Goal 3 – gender equality and empowerment of women – puts all other MDGs at risk, including those dedicated to maternal and child health, HIV, TB and malaria. Health workers need the skills to address health-based inequities because laws and policies only have limited effect. To help countries to reduce gender inequities, WHO has published *Gender mainstreaming manual for health managers: a practical approach* that includes training materials for running a 3–4-day workshop and assessing gender equity.

### New guidelines for drug-resistant tuberculosis

*WHO guidelines for the programmatic management of drug-resistant tuberculosis: 2011 update* cover diagnosis, treatment, monitoring, duration and cost-effectiveness of different models of tuberculosis care. The 11 recommendations include rapid drug

## Looking ahead

**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](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>

**1 October: International Day of Older Persons** <http://www.un.org/en/events/olderpersonsday>

**4 October: World Habitat Day** <http://www.unhabitat.org>

**10 October: World Mental Health Day** <http://www.wfmh.org/00WorldMentalHealthDay.htm>

**14 October: World Sight Day** <http://www.vision2020.org>

**15 October: Global Handwashing Day** <http://www.globalhandwashingday.org>

**16 October: World Food Day** <http://www.fao.org/getinvolved/worldfoodday>

**17 October: International Day for the Eradication of Poverty** <http://www.oct17.org>

**20 October: World Statistics Day** <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/wsd>

**18–22 October: World Conference on Social Determinants of Health Rio de Janeiro, Brazil**

**14 November: World Diabetes Day** <http://www.idf.org/worlddiabetesday>

**20 November: Universal Children's Day** <http://www.un.org/en/events/childrenday>

**20 November: World Day of Remembrance for Road Traffic Victims** <http://www.worlddayofremembrance.org>

**25 November: International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women** [http://www.who.int/mediacentre/events/annual/elimination\\_vaw](http://www.who.int/mediacentre/events/annual/elimination_vaw)

susceptibility testing and treating patients outside of hospital to reduce travel, costs, social isolation and risk of reinfection. [http://www.who.int/tb/challenges/mdr/programmatic\\_guidelines\\_for\\_mdrtb](http://www.who.int/tb/challenges/mdr/programmatic_guidelines_for_mdrtb) ■