

Recent news from WHO

- A **new gene** that enables some types of bacteria to be highly resistant to almost all antibiotics has been identified, according to an article published online in *The Lancet Infectious Diseases* on 11 August 2010. This finding draws attention to the issue of antimicrobial resistance, a global public health issue that could hamper the control of many infectious diseases. WHO suggests that countries should be prepared to implement hospital infection control measures to limit the spread of multidrug resistant strains and to reinforce national policy on prudent use of antibiotics. Antimicrobial resistance will be the theme of WHO's World Health Day 2011.
- WHO Director-General, Dr Margaret Chan, announced the end of phase 6 of the **influenza A H1N1 pandemic**. "We are now moving into the post-pandemic period. The new H1N1 virus has largely run its course," she said. "Based on experience with past pandemics, we expect the H1N1 virus to take on the behaviour of a seasonal influenza virus and continue to circulate for some years to come. Recently published studies indicate that 20–40% of populations in some areas have been infected by the H1N1 virus and thus have some level of protective immunity."
- On 9 September, more than 350 health experts met in Bangkok, Thailand, to discuss ways to improve access to **life-saving medical devices** in developing countries. There are around 10 500 different types of medical devices on the market and revenue from sales of medical devices worldwide was estimated at around US\$ 210 billion for 2008. A WHO survey of medical device use in 140 countries reveals that too many people are currently excluded from their benefits. For example, the average availability of computed tomography (CT) scanners is one per 64 900 people on average in high-income countries, but one per 3.5 million people in low-income countries. Ten countries have so far reported that they have no radiotherapy unit at all, meaning almost 100 million people do not have access to cancer treatment.
- Up to 85% of people with **mental and psychosocial disabilities** have no access to treatment, according to a WHO report, *Targeting people with mental health conditions as a vulnerable group*, which was launched on 16 August at the United Nations in New York. Even though development actors have pledged to focus their work on the most vulnerable in a community, the majority of development and poverty alleviation programmes do not reach people with mental or psychosocial disabilities. "The lack of visibility, voice and power of people with mental and psychosocial disabilities means that an extra effort needs to be made to reach out to and involve them more directly in development programmes," says Dr Ala Alwan, Assistant Director-General for Noncommunicable Diseases and Mental Health at WHO. An estimated one in four people globally will experience a mental health condition in their lifetime. WHO is working jointly with the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) to integrate mental health into development programmes in countries.
- The number of women dying due to complications during **pregnancy and childbirth** decreased by 34% from an estimated 546 000 in 1990 to 358 000 in 2008, according to a report, *Trends in maternal mortality*, released on 15 September by the World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and The World Bank. While this progress is notable, the 34% decline since 1990 translates into an average annual decline of just 2.3%, which is less than half of what is needed to achieve the Millennium Development Goal target of reducing the maternal mortality ratio by 75% between 1990 and 2015. This will require an annual decline of 5.5%. Pregnant women still die from four major causes: severe bleeding after childbirth, infections, hypertensive disorders and unsafe abortion. In 2008, about 1000 women died due to these complications every day.

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