

## Public health round-up

## Cause for celebration on International Women's Day

Girls in developing countries are set to benefit from protection against cervical cancer in the coming decades following the announcement of increased funding for human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccination. In 2012, the GAVI Alliance is calling for applications from countries seeking support in introducing HPV vaccines through existing health programs. Nine low- and middle-income countries expect to introduce the vaccine before 2015 and WHO is advising how best to deliver such vaccines. By 2023, it is hoped that 62 million girls in 40 countries will receive the vaccine. This is something to celebrate for women's health on 8 March, International Women's Day.



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## More drugs for HIV

A new agreement signed last month will make low-cost HIV drugs more accessible in developing countries. Indian antiretrovirals manufacturer, Emcure Pharmaceuticals, announced last month that it has joined the Medicines Patent Pool. This key supplier of generic antiretroviral medicines will be able to manufacture several products licensed to the Pool by Gilead Sciences, including emtricitabine, cobicistat, elvitegravir and a fixed-dose combination of these medicines plus tenofovir. Emcure has been producing HIV medicines for more than 12 years and is the third generic manufacturer to take licences from the Medicines Patent Pool.

## Just published

## Patient privacy in eHealth

Privacy of the doctor–patient relationship is at the heart of good health care. How do health systems protect patient privacy in the digital age? WHO's Global Observatory for eHealth set out to answer that question by investigating how legal frameworks in different countries address the need to protect patient privacy in electronic health records. *Legal frameworks for eHealth*, published last month by WHO, is available from: [http://www.who.int/goe/publications/ehealth\\_series\\_vol5](http://www.who.int/goe/publications/ehealth_series_vol5)

## More than getting fit

If  $x$  people cycle or walk  $y$  distance on most days, what is the economic value of the resulting improvements in mortality rates? WHO's Regional Office for

Europe has launched an online tool that calculates the answer to this question so that policy-makers can demonstrate the benefits of promoting active transport methods. Health economic assessment tools for walking and for cycling are designed to be used by transport planners, traffic engineers, health economists and health promotion experts. Access the tools at [www.heatwalkingcycling.org](http://www.heatwalkingcycling.org)

## Classifying disease

WHO's International Classification of Diseases has just published its 10th revision (ICD-10), the latest in a series that has its origins in the 1850s. The first edition, known as the International List of Causes of Death, was adopted by the International Statistical Institute in 1893. The ICD is the international standard diagnostic classification that is

## A pledge for world's poorest



Rudi Roels

“ Maybe as the decade goes on people will be wondering whether we should still call these diseases ‘neglected’. ”

Bill Gates

Donor governments, private philanthropists and pharmaceutical companies have pledged strong support for neglected tropical diseases at a meeting in London on 30 January. Public and private partners have committed to work together to support WHO's newly launched 2020 Roadmap on Neglected Tropical Diseases. These diseases, including leishmaniasis, onchocerciasis (river blindness), trachoma, leprosy, schistosomiasis and intestinal worms, affect more than one billion people worldwide, mostly the world's poorest. Major pharmaceutical companies, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the governments of the United States of America, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United Arab Emirates and The World Bank announced support including medicine donations, sharing expertise for better research and funds to support WHO's work to overcome these neglected tropical diseases.

## Bugs, drugs and smoke

Since WHO was founded in 1948, the world has changed dramatically and so too has the health of its people. But while some scourges (such as smallpox, measles and polio) have subsided, others have made a comeback, such as new drug-resistant forms of tuberculosis, and frightening diseases such as Ebola have appeared. *Bugs, drugs and smoke* is a book published this month by WHO. Aimed at teenagers and young adults who are interested in working in public health, it explains through personal anecdotes and first-hand interviews how individuals, communities, institutions and countries can improve people's health when they work together. It shows the role WHO has played in providing the technical support and coordination to make progress possible. <http://apps.who.int/bookorders>



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used by health workers, epidemiologists, policy-makers and health services such as insurance providers. <http://www.who.int/classifications/icd>

### Feeding tiny babies

About 20 million babies weighing less than 2500 g are born worldwide each year, 96.5% of them in developing countries. These babies are at high risk of infectious disease, developmental delay and death during infancy and childhood. WHO recognizes that feeding practices have an important impact on these babies' immediate and long-term prospects. New guidelines provide recommendations for health workers on optimal feeding of low birth-weight infants in low- and middle-income countries. [http://www.who.int/maternal\\_child\\_adolescent/documents/infant\\_feeding\\_low\\_bw](http://www.who.int/maternal_child_adolescent/documents/infant_feeding_low_bw)

### Research scan

#### Live positive, live long

People who rate their health as "excellent" are much more likely to live longer. While it is likely that these people have healthier lifestyles, a study published in *PLoS ONE* last month has found that the correlation exists even after accounting for factors such as tobacco use, blood glucose and pressure, and medical history. Researchers from the Institute of Social and Preventive Medicine at the University of Zurich in Switzerland found that Swiss men who rated their health as "very poor" were 3.3 times more likely to die earlier than men of the same age who rated their health as

"excellent," and the risk of an earlier death was 1.9 times higher in women who rated their health as "very poor" than for those who rated it as "excellent". <http://www.plosone.org/article/info%3Adoi%2F10.1371%2Fjournal.pone.0030795>

#### Malaria restricts growth

A study of almost 3800 pregnancies, in communities on the border of Thailand and Myanmar, provides the most accurate evidence to date of the importance of preventing malaria in pregnancy. The study published in *PLoS One* used antenatal ultrasound scans to show that the diameter of the average fetus's head was significantly smaller if malaria infection occurred in the first half of pregnancy when compared to pregnancies unaffected by malaria. Low birth weight is the most important risk factor for neonatal mortality in developing countries. <http://www.plosone.org/article/info%3Adoi%2F10.1371%2Fjournal.pone.0031411>

#### Too many tests

American orthopaedic surgeons are spending approximately US\$ 2 billion per year in unnecessary health care. A study published last month in the *American Journal of Orthopaedics* found that around one quarter of the procedures, tests and hospital admissions requested by orthopaedic surgeons are unnecessary and are done to protect the physicians from accusations of malpractice. From a national survey of 2000 orthopaedic surgeons, 96% reported practicing defensive medicine at an average annual cost of

US\$ 101 820 per doctor. <http://www.amjorthopedics.com> ■

### Looking ahead

**19–22 March: 1st World Congress on Healthy Ageing, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia** <http://www.healthyageingcongress.com>

**22 March: World Water Day** <http://www.unwater.org/worldwaterday/>

**24 March: World Tuberculosis Day** [http://www.stoptb.org/events/world\\_tb\\_day](http://www.stoptb.org/events/world_tb_day)

**7 April: World Health Day – Ageing and health** <http://www.who.int/world-health-day>

**24–26 April: Forum 2012 – conference hosted by the Council on Health Research and Development (COHRED) and the Department of Science and Technology of South Africa, Cape Town, South Africa** <http://www.forum2012.org>

**25 April: World Malaria Day** <http://www.rollbackmalaria.org/worldmaliaday>

**31 May: World No Tobacco Day – Tobacco industry interference** <http://www.who.int/tobacco/wntd>

**14 June: World Blood Donor Day** <http://www.who.int/worldblooddonorday>

**31 October to 3 November: Global Symposium on Health Systems Research, Beijing, China** [www.hsr-symposium.org](http://www.hsr-symposium.org)