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**NEWS IN BRIEF**

**Cot deaths higher at weekend**

Babies die more often from cot death at the weekend than during the rest of the week, according to research in *Arch Dis Child* (2004; 89: 670–72). After analysing about 13 000 deaths between 1986 and 1998, the researchers noted that on Saturdays and Sundays, cot deaths accounted for a third of total deaths. The researchers said that although the increase in such deaths at the weekend was small, “health-care professionals could consider improving access to health care at the weekends”.

**Glaxo to publish results online**

GlaxoSmithKline (GSK) has said that it will publish findings of some of its clinical trials on the internet. The pharmaceutical company has been under scrutiny recently, after it was accused of withholding negative results about its antidepressant drug paroxetine. Data showed that the drug was widely ineffective in young people and could increase suicidal tendencies.

**Vaccination and evolution**

Vaccination could lead to more virulent strains of the pathogens they are designed to prevent, say researchers in *PLoS Biol* (2004; 2: 230). The investigators injected immunised and non-immunised mice with malaria parasites. The parasites that evolved in the immune mice were more virulent than those in the non-immune mice. The researchers postulate that the pathogens that survived the immune system of the vaccinated mice were “genetically equipped to stay ahead of the advancing immune system”.

**The eyes have it**

The coronavirus that causes severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) has been detected in tears, report investigators in *Br J Ophthalmol* (2004; 88: 861–63). Tear samples were taken from 36 people suspected of having SARS in Singapore, and three tested positive for the virus. This method is simple, allows detection early in the course of infection, and could be an important diagnostic tool, say the researchers. However, many health-care workers are in close proximity to patients’ eyes, and more stringent barrier methods and isolation measures could be crucial when managing people with SARS.

**Global warming and asthma**

Asthma rates could rise as global warming increases, indicate results in *J Occup Environ Med* (2004; 61: 609–15). An investigation of more than 670 000 children identified a strong link between indoor humidity and asthma rates in western Europe. A 10% rise in humidity corresponded to a 2·7% increase in symptoms. Warm air encourages house dustmites and mould, which can irritate airways. Climate experts believe that city dwellers especially should expect warmer, more humid summers in the future.

**AIDS in African soldiers**

AIDS is the main cause of death in Africa’s military and police forces, say researchers in *BMJ Public Health* (2004, 4: 24). In a survey of 480 Nigerian naval officers, a third said they visited prostitutes, with only a half using a condom. More than half of all interviewed believed that AIDS was curable. The researchers suggest that since naval personnel interact with civilians, they could form a bridging group for spreading the infection into the general population. Educational programmes, promotion of condoms, and changes in transfer policies should address this problem, say the investigators.

**Risperidone for manic symptoms**

Monotherapy with risperidone quickly reduces symptoms in patients with bipolar I disorder who are having an acute manic episode, according to findings in *Am J Psychiatry* (2004; 161: 1057–65). Compared with placebo, risperidone significantly improved mean scores on the Young mania rating scale. Post-hoc analysis showed that almost twice as many on risperidone than on placebo achieved remission.

**Causes of death in Sudan**

Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) have published a study on causes of death in Darfur, Sudan, which shows levels of violence and malnutrition above emergency limits. The organisation’s medical teams do not believe that the current infrastructure for aid will be capable of halting the region’s famine. Violence was the main cause of death, with adult men being targeted the most. Also, on May 20, a child was paralysed with polio in the region, which has not had a case for 3 years. The virus is genetically similar to that endemic to northern Nigeria. Health officials have said that immunisation campaigns will soon be restarted in the north of the country. Immunisation is urgently needed since in the past year, 10 previously polio-free countries in Africa have seen children paralysed with the disease.

**Are child-proof bottle caps safe?**

At the beginning of Child Safety Week, experts stress that parents should not be lulled into a false sense of security with the child-resistant tops of medicine bottles and chemical containers. Children younger than 5 years are at most risk of accidentally swallowing medication and household cleaning products. The Child Accident Prevention Trust states that six strong aspirins could harm a toddler, and one or two mouthfuls of toilet cleaner could cause internal burning. Thus, families are cautioned to prevent such incidents by storing such dangerous products well out of reach of young children.

**Vitamin K and anticoagulation**

Regulation of vitamin K is important in patients on coumarin anticoagulants, say researchers in *Am J Med* (2004; 116: 651–56). Eating more vitamin K-rich foods led to under-coagulation, and decreasing consumption had the opposite effect. The researchers modified the diets of those who were under or overcoagulated. Coagulation increased by day 7 in those whose diets had lowered vitamin K, and fell by day 4 in those supplemented with vitamin K. The researchers suggest that the usual advice given to such patients to reduce their vitamin K intake is not always accurate.