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**NEWS IN BRIEF**

**Left-brain damage and immunity**
The effect of brain damage on the immune system might depend on which half of the brain is injured, suggest researchers in *Annals Neurol* (published early online May 24, 2004). In patients with epilepsy, who had brain surgery to control seizures, those who had surgery on the left side had significantly decreased immune function. Those who had surgery on the right side, however, had a rise in immune function. The researchers point out that this might hold true for right-handed patients only, and left-handed or ambidextrous people might have the opposite response.

**Ebola strain in Sudan**
A new strain of the Ebola virus has emerged in southern Sudan, according to WHO. The organisation has traced a disease similar to Ebola to a town called Yambio. 15 people have been confirmed to have the virus and four have died. The symptoms of Ebola—which include fever and joint pain—resemble that of malaria, which complicates diagnosis. The last major Ebola outbreak was 2 years ago in Uganda, in which hundreds died.

**Neck injury in rugby players**
“Return to rugby union after anterior cervical discectomy is both likely and safe and therefore need not be a career-ending procedure”, conclude investigators at BritSpine 2004 (Nottingham, UK, April 28–30). Of 19 professional rugby players who received neck injuries and had this procedure, 14 (74%) returned to their playing careers between 5 and 17 months after surgery (most at 6 months). However, the five other players never managed to play the sport again. Three retired

**Green tea and arterial plaques**
Antioxidants in green tea might prevent development of atherosclerotic plaques, but these chemicals are powerless against existing lesions, say researchers in *Circulation* (May 25, 2004). By using a mouse model of plaque formation, researchers looked at the effect of epigallocatechin-3-gallate (EGCG)—an antioxidant derived from green tea—after carotid artery injury. The mice receiving EGCG developed fewer plaques than those not given the antioxidant, but treatment made no difference to established plaques.

**OM autism report**
The Institute of Medicine (IOM) has rejected a link between the MMR vaccine and development of autism. The committee concluded that there was also insufficient evidence for a causal relation between thimerosal-containing vaccines and autism. In addition, it says that potential biological mechanisms for vaccine-induced autism proposed so far are theoretical only. The committee does not recommend that the current vaccine schedule should be reviewed.

**Blood glucose and mortality**
High blood glucose after hospital admission for acute myocardial infarction (MI) could predict an increased mortality in patients with or without diabetes, say researchers in *Arch Int Med* (2004; 164: 982–88). Every 180 mg/L rise in blood glucose resulted in a 4% rise in mortality risk for non-diabetics and a 5% rise for diabetics. Of the 737 who were previously non-diabetic, 101 had admission blood glucose of 2000 mg/L or higher. The researchers conclude “admission blood glucose level after acute MI may be an important tool for risk stratification at follow-up”.

**Kawasaki disease**
Early treatment (first 4 days) with intravenous γ globulin (IVIG) for Kawasaki disease is no better than late treatment (5–9 days), according to findings in *Pediatr* (2004; 144: 496–99). Prevalence of acute cardiac lesions or cardiac sequelae did not differ between the two groups. However, although early treatment might not yield better results, it could allow for time for additional treatment if initial IVIG fails. The researchers said: “You should treat as soon as diagnosed. If you treat earlier, you can treat many times within 10 days.”

**SARS vaccine tested in people**
Chinese researchers are testing severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) vaccine in humans, according to reports in the Chinese media. Four volunteers were injected with the vaccine that has previously been effective in goats, horses, and monkeys. China approved testing of the experimental vaccine in January. A WHO representative said that those handling the vaccine should take precautions even though it contains a dead virus. Public-health authorities believe that a safe SARS vaccine is at least 1–2 years away.

**Prion protein in food chain**
Prion proteins can accumulate in the muscles of infected sheep, say investigators in *Nat Med* (published online; DOI: 10.1038/nm1055). Researchers noted that the protein can be present in the muscles of infected sheep for many months before symptoms are seen. This is the first indication of muscle infectivity in animals that are eaten by human beings, potentially leading to variant Creutzfeld-Jakob disease.

**Male breast cancer rising**
The incidence of breast cancer in men is increasing, according to findings in Cancer (July 1, 2004). Men with breast cancer also generally have more advanced disease at diagnosis than do women, say the researchers, who suggest this discrepancy might be due to misdiagnosis of male breast lumps as gynaecomastia, a benign growth of breast tissue. Men are also more likely than women to have oestrogen-receptor-positive tumours so may benefit from tamoxifen treatment.