

An Occasional Medical Newsletter from The Blood Care Foundation

Dear Member,

Easter is here, the sun is shining at last and the time for summer holidays is fast approaching. Now is the time to think of travel safety. Welcome to my 30th Newsletter.

Personal Safety Precautions

We often worry about the disease we might catch whilst we are abroad, but we seldom consider the dangers of mugging, being drugged or knocked over by a drunken driver. Leggat and Klein have produced a very comprehensive review of the personal safety aspect of travelling abroad. It is well worth reading. (*J.Travel.Med.* 2001;**8**(1):46-51)

HIV in China

China is facing a major epidemic of HIV. It is estimated that there are currently 600,000 people infected and this figure will rise to 6 million by 2005. The problem is partly due to the unsafe practices of the "blood heads" running the black market for blood and partly from ignorance. Although 54% of people interviewed for a recent survey by the Chinese Ministry of Health believed that HIV could be transmitted by sharing tableware or chopsticks, only 3% realised the virus could be transmitted via bodily fluids. Further information on this problem can be found in "Lack of Blood Safety Measures Contributes to Rapid Spread of HIV in China" at http://www.aabb.org/marketplace/Subscribe_Online/AABB_Weekly_Report/wr01-01-26.htm.

HES and Renal failure

Five years ago the first evidence that hydroxyethylstarch (HES), a plasma substitute widely used in clinical practice, might be a renal toxin appeared. A recent randomised trial has shown that patients, with severe sepsis, treated with HES were significantly more likely to get acute renal failure than patients given gelatins. The authors suggest that HES should not be given to patients at risk of renal failure. (*Lancet.* 2001;**357**:911-6)

New Typhoid Vaccine

A group from NIH have developed a new vaccine against *Salmonella typhi*, which produces a good response, is well tolerated and is effective in protecting young children. Over 11,000 Vietnamese children aged 2 – 5 years were enrolled in a double blind trial. 4 of 5,525 children given the vaccine developed typhoid, whilst 47 of 5,566 children given saline injections contracted the disease. (*New.Engl.J.Med.* 2001;**344**:1263-9)

Malaria in Canada

The incidence of severe malaria in Canada has more than doubled since 1994. The peak was in 1997 when there were 1036 cases, a figure 10 times that for the USA. It is suggested that this results from adverse publicity about mefloquine and so travellers are not using it as a prophylactic in countries where chloroquine resistance has been established. (*Can.Med.Assoc.J.* 2001;**164**:654-9)

Vaccination Against Hepatitis A and B

All aspects of a vaccination policy against hepatitis A and B are covered in a recent supplement of the Journal of Travel Medicine. Topics covered include vaccine programs for employees, the risks to the travelling public and ways to improve take-up. (*J.Travel.Med.* 2001;**8(Suppl 1)**:S1-S23)

Birth Weight and Marital Status

It is already well recognised that unmarried men have a shorter life span and are more likely to suffer from cardiovascular disease than their married counterparts. Small birth size is also associated with an increased risk of cardiovascular disease. A recent study in Finland of 3577 men born during the decade 1924-33 has now shown that men who weighed <3kg at birth are much less likely to marry than ones who were >3kg at birth. This confirms a study performed in Hertfordshire, England on 1659 men born in the decade 1920-30. (*BMJ.* 2001;**322**:771)

Another Danger of Being Colour Blind

About 8% of European males are red/green colour blind and can have difficulty in recognising blood in bodily fluids, especially faeces. In theory this could lead to a delay in the diagnosis of dangerous cancers. Perhaps the time has come to include questions with regard to colour blindness in all our consultations. (*Ann.Int.Med.* 2001;**161**:461-5)

Breast Cancer

A recent survey has shown mammography screening reduces deaths from breast cancer by 63%. Another study recently revealed that no benefit is gained by women taking tamoxifen for more than 5 years. (*Cancer.* 2001;**91**:1734-31 & *J.Nat.Can.Inst.* 2001;**93**:684-90)

HIV Drug Resistance is Increasing

27% of new cases of HIV diagnosed in the UK in 2000 had drug resistant variants. A similar significant increase has also been identified in the USA. 3% of cases had strains resistant to all three available classes of antiretroviral drugs. (*BMJ.* 2001;**322**:1074-5 & 1087-8)

Aspirin as a Prophylactic for Heart Disease

Aspirin should be prescribed for primary prevention in patients with an annual risk of > 1.5% for a coronary event. When the risk is <0.5% then the risk of bleeding outweighs any benefit. Accurate risk calculations can be made from the tables based on the Framingham data. (*Heart.* 2001;**85**:265-71)

Your Sweet Tooth is in Your Genes

Your appreciation of sweetness, via the T1R3 receptor, is controlled by a gene on chromosome 4, close to the gene, which controls the bitterness receptor. So perhaps it's not your fault that you eat too many sweets! (*Nature Genetics.* 2001;**28**:58-63)

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