Non-Smoking: Begin With Kids Under Age 11

A study of children's behaviour in 10 European countries has shown that health education programmes to encourage non-smoking should begin with under-11-year-olds. And that programmes to help children quit should begin with 13-year-olds - before they succumb to the addictiveness of tobacco.

According to the results of samplings among children of those ages: "Already by the age of eleven, 30 per cent of boys and 20 per cent of girls have tried smoking," and by age thirteen, 48 per cent of boys and 43 per cent of girls smoke." All told, the study is based on a survey of some 38,000 children, 13,000 aged 11, 13,600 aged 13, and 11,600 aged 15. About a half were boys and a half girls in the three groups.

Carried out by the WHO's regional office for Europe, the study is aimed at determining how many children in the three ages smoke - daily, weekly and occasionally; that is less than once a week - and what can be done about it.

The study was presented last month at the 1st European Conference on Tobacco Policy held in Madrid. "It is vital to commence educational programmes during the period when most children experiment," the report counsels, "and before they become regular smokers." Although at age 11 "daily or weekly smoking was relatively rare," the report says, samplings showed countries with "high rates of occasional smoking especially among boys."

It is between ages 11 and 13 that "an increasing number take up smoking on an experimental basis," the report notes. While 0.5 per cent of boys and 0.1 per cent of girls smoked daily among 11-year-olds, the numbers increased to 3.9 per cent for boys and 4.1 per cent among 13-year-olds girls.

At age 15, the number of daily smokers increased to 15 per cent for boys and 13.8 per cent for girls, increasing still more to about 30 per cent for both sexes by age 18. "More than 60 per cent of children had tried smoking by the age of 15," the report says. "Almost all these will be daily smokers before age 18 ... and eventually addicted smokers." Among teenage smokers, girls are in the majority.

Where under-age kids get cigarettes, despite laws.

WHO photo

From UNEP: A Sober Report on Global Contamination

Some 500 million people today live in urban areas throughout the world where the average level of sulphur dioxide pollution endangers their health, according to a first global report on the effects on human health of air and water pollution and food contamination.

A report recently prepared showed that children are exposed to pollution from coal, oil and gas combustion and household traffic dust. Another report, the Third World Network Features, was authored by a service of the Consumer's Association of Penang, Malaysia.

The report is the work of the Global Environment Monitoring System (GEMS) of the U.N. Environmental Programme. Details:

- Air. Monitored from 170 sites in or around large cities in 50 countries where pollution levels are generally highest. According to the report, the WHO's Director-General, Philip Woodrow, the director of the GEMS, the places chosen represent different climatic conditions, levels of development and pollution.
- Water. Monitored from 344 stations, 240 of them on rivers, 43 on lakes and 61 on ground-water systems. Of European rivers, the cost of "producing safe, palatable drinking water" has risen drastically.
- Food. Monitored from 19 contaminants in more than 400 individual foods in the diets of 35 countries. In three decades, the use of pesticides in many industrialised countries, the report points out that pesticides are still in the soil and water and can enter the food chain. As a result, measurable levels of these chemicals continue to occur in foods of animal origin such as fish, milk and meat.

The lowest concentrations of lead in blood were found in
**Newsbriefs**

**“An Open Mind is the Morale Essence of Medicine”**
So says the calligrapher here by Dr Taro Takemi, President of the Japan Medical Association (1976-82), who has given his name to a programme in international health administered by the Harvard School of Public Health.

With an endowment from two pharmaceutical companies, Tsumura Jun­tendo Inc. and Kaken Seiyaku, the programme provides graduates and mid-career professionals with a 10-month fellowship beginning on 1 September 1989. The deadline for application is 15 January.

(for full details write to Professor David Bell, Takemi Programme in International Health, Harvard University, Boston, Mass. 02112)

**No More Free Samples**
The United Kingdom’s baby food industry has agreed to discontinue the long-established practice of giving away free samples of baby milk powder in hospitals, thus in effect, complying with WHO’s International Code of Marketing Breast-milk Substitutes.

The move, by the Infant and Diabetic Foods Association of the Food and Drink Federation, was timed to coincide with a nation-wide initiative, launched in October, to promote breast-feeding, for which the industry also pledged financial support. These decisions drew praise from Parliamentary Secretary for Health, Edwina Currie, who characterised developments as a "further step by the government, in partnership with industry, to protect breast-feeding.

**Presidential Warning**: In an address to mark the 40th anniversary of WHO, Sir Dawda Jawara, President of Gambia, had this to say about smoking: "The threat to health of tobacco, and the role that advertising plays in promoting smoking, is one of the most serious health hazards in the developing countries.

**Generic Drugs**: A 17-month campaign led by Dr Alfredo Bengzon, Secretary of Health for the Philippines, resulted in the adoption of the Generics Act of 1988 by the country’s legislature. Signed into law by President Corazon Aquino last September, the act reflects policy to make low-cost drugs available to populations.

According to the Department of Health, a total of 11,412 medications were registered in the Philippines at the end of last year. Of those, 8,067 were brand name, and hence more expensive, drugs.

It is also part of the policy to develop self-sufficiency in the production of pharmaceuticals. At present from 90 to 95 per cent are imported. Trans-national corporations account for 75 per cent of sales, amounting to an estimated $500 million yearly.

**Changed Name**: Hungary has advised WHO that the Szeged Medical University has changed its name to the Albert Szent-Gyorgyi Orvostudomanyi Egyetem (P.O. Box 479, H-6701 Szeged). The change will be reflected in the seventh World Directory of Medical Schools.

**In the next issue**
The January-February 1989 issue of World Health takes as its theme the slogan of this year’s World Health Day: “Let’s talk health.” Only if we make sure of all the available means of communication can we ensure that the messages of good hygiene and sensible lifestyles arrive where they are needed: the country, the town, the village, the family, the individual. This issue examines some of the ways of “putting the message across.”