

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 – why they do so, 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



Where under-age kids get cigarettes, despite laws.

WHO photo



Editor: Peter Ozorio



Celebrating the Role of Sports in Health.

Celebrating the role of sports in health, these U.N. stamps draw inspiration from the pledge by the International Olympics Committee and WHO to promote healthy lifestyles. The two organizations committed themselves to that goal following an aide-memoire signed in 1985 by them.

Appropriately enough, the stamps were issued in the year of the 24th Olympic Games. Said U.N. Secretary-General, Javier Perez Cuellar, in a comment on their theme: "Active physical exercise is a necessity for everyone at all stages of life."

The stamps were designed by U.S. artist LeRoy Neiman, described as a "master of sports art," and, in 1984, the official artist to the Winter Games in Sarajevo, and the Summer Games in Los Angeles.

The stamps are available from the U.N. post office in New York (denominations of \$0.25 and \$0.38 cents), in Geneva (Swiss francs 0.50 and 1.40), and in Vienna (Austrian schillings 6 and 8).

In a related development, the decision to hold the Seoul Olympics last September in an essentially smoke-free environment was applauded by WHO Director-General, Dr Hiroshi Nakajima. He said, in a tribute to the organizing committee, that it had put the cigarette where it belongs, "out of bounds."

The committee in Seoul is the second, after Calgary in Canada, to have taken measures to limit smoking during the Olympics. These decisions "unequivocally make the point," he said, that "there is no place for tobacco in the world of sports."

While commending the organizing committees of the 1988 Olympics, Dr Nakajima deplored "advertisements that link tobacco with sport and healthy living," as well as practices by cigarette manufacturers that circumvent bans on television advertising.

He referred specifically to the sponsorship of such events as Grand Prix car racing, snooker tournaments and sailboat racing. Because of TV coverage of such sporting events, cigarette logos and colours are constantly seen on screens, thus in effect indirectly advertising the brands.

"There is no more fitting moment, therefore, than these Olympics to sound an alert against such practices, and to urge all countries to resist them through legislation, and through health education and information," he said. ■

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 a third will be daily smokers before age 18... and eventually addicted smokers." Among teenage smokers, girls are in the majority.

From UNEP: A Sober Report on Global Contamination

Some 600 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 billion more are exposed to pollution from coal, wood and oil combustion and automobile traffic dust, writes Horace Awori, for the Third World Network Features, 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 Michael Gwynne, the GEMS director, 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 reservoirs. European rivers have the highest average levels of, primarily, nitrogen and phosphorus, the report says, "some 45 times higher than their natural level". This results in algal blooms that are harmful to fisheries. And because of the high levels of chemicals in rivers, the cost of "producing safe, palatable drinking water" has risen drastically.

UNEP warns that as a result of population increases and the deterioration of water quality, the per capita availability of water fit for human consumption is dwindling rapidly, and in the Third World will decline by almost 50 per cent by the year 2000.

- **Food.** Monitored from 19 contaminants in more than 400 individual foods in the diets of 35 countries.

In spite of the decreased 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

Tokyo while the highest were in Mexico City.

The report suggests that the explanation may lie in the fact that petrol has been lead-free in Tokyo since 1976, while Mexico's has the highest lead content. ■

Heart Disease: Few Programmes in Third World

Despite the growing prevalence in developing countries, few of them carry out nationwide programmes against the commonest of disorders of the heart and arteries. Reports presented at a recent WHO meeting in Geneva show, for instance:

China. Says Dr Tao Shou-chi, of Beijing's Fu Wai Hospital: "No national programmes on community control of hypertension have yet been officially developed."

Chile. Says Dr Ramon Rosas, director of health services in one of his country's 26 regions: The number of hypertensive patients under care - some 10,000 in his region - "are too small (by comparison with) the prevalence of the disease" throughout Chile.

India. Says Dr Sivarama-krishna Padmavati, of the All India Heart Foundation in New Delhi: "Nation-wide programmes are very difficult in view of the large population involved," particularly since health is a responsibility for each of India's 25 states.

Kenya. Says Dr William Lore of the University of Nairobi: "At the moment there are no programmes for the control of hypertension in Kenya."

Philippines. Says Dr Jose V. Yason, of the Philippine Heart Center, Quezon City: "How to motivate people to practise what they know is a major challenge."



Beginning in childhood to prevent heart disease later.

WHO photo

Newsbriefs

"An Open Mind is the Morale Essence of Medicine"

So says the calligraphy here by Dr Taro Takemi, President of the Japan Medical Association (1957-82) and the World Medical Association (1975-82), 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 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 Dietetic 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 K. 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 medicaments were registered in the Philippines at the end of last year. Of those, 8,067 were brand name, and hence more expensive, drugs; 3,345 were generic 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 Orvostudományi 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."

Authors of the month

Dr Zbigniew BANKOWSKI is Executive Secretary of the Council for International Organizations of Medical Sciences (CIOMS) in Geneva.

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