Malaria: mosquitos that travel by plane

Almost 2,000 million people on our planet live at constant risk of malaria and more than 100 million are attacked each year by this dangerous disease. But the remainder, those who live in countries where malaria has long since disappeared, would be wrong to believe themselves entirely safe. Not only is WHO observing a distinct and regular recrudescence of the disease, which threatens areas where it was only a bad memory, but even the big cities of the developed and temperate North can occasionally be endangered by malaria-bearing mosquitos that arrive by plane.

Air travel is now so swift that disease-carrying insects can be transported from one continent to another without suffering ill-effects. If they find on arrival that the temperature and humidity suit them, they can transmit the parasites they are carrying. This is precisely what has happened in Amsterdam, Brussels, London, Paris, Zurich and just recently Geneva: malaria cases have occurred in people who have never left home but who live close to airports. Admittedly the imported mosquitos do not survive for long outside their natural environment, but the danger they represent must not be ignored.

In order to prevent malaria or other tropical diseases being imported in this way, WHO recommends the routine "disinsecting" of aircraft as they leave endemic countries. Cabins and cargo holds of aircraft can be treated effectively with aerosol sprays containing insecticides that are harmless for passengers, or the inside walls of planes can be treated with a residual insecticide of the pyrethroid group. WHO stresses that all aircraft making stopovers in countries where diseases are transmitted by airborne insects should be treated in these ways.

Our Planet – our health
Think globally – act locally

This double slogan, with its echo of the words of the late French ecologist Rene Dubos, has been chosen by WHO to epitomise World Health Day 1990. The choice reflects the growing awareness of environmental problems, and WHO's conviction that they will be a major topic of worldwide concern during the next decade – and indeed well into the 21st century.

More and more diseases today bear the stamp "made by man." City smog, caused in large part by the ever-increasing numbers of motor vehicles on the road, results in a growing incidence of respiratory diseases. Pesticides aimed at increasing crop yields are misused to the point where they endanger our food and water.

An increase in skin cancers is feared by some scientists as they monitor the erosion of the ozone layer in the upper atmosphere, our protection against intense solar radiation. That erosion seems at least in part to be the result of over-use of chlorofluorocarbons – key chemicals used in refrigerators and aerosols. And now the scientists are finding evidence that a build-up of many decades of industrial gases may be causing global warm-up. If the planet's temperature rises even by a couple of degrees, it would be sufficient to throw the delicate balance of our climates out of gear, and could lead to a melting of the polar ice resulting in a disastrous rise in sea-level.

WHO has for most of its four decades of existence given high priority to safeguarding air, soil and water. It regularly updates its recommendations on "safe levels" of pollutants in accordance with new scientific findings.

In choosing the broad theme of environment and health for World Health Day next year, WHO intends to spotlight the measures that individuals, communities and countries can and must take to check any further deterioration in the overall health of the planet: because it is on the health of the Earth that depends the health of all its human passengers.

Codex Alimentarius: Standards and codes for safe food

More than 250 participants from industrialised and developing countries, from the food industry and from non-governmental organizations involved in food production and regulation recently took part in a meeting of the Codex Alimentarius Commission in Geneva, the purpose of which was to develop standards and codes for safe food. The Commission is under the joint auspices of WHO and the Rome-based Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO).

Amongst the recommendations agreed upon at the meeting is the need to...
Newsbriefs

- **Appointment.** Dr Mahmoud Fahmy Fathalla (Egypt) has been appointed Director of WHO's Special Programme of Research Development and Research Training in Human Reproduction (HRP). He succeeds Dr José Barzelatto, who has retired. Dr H. A. Hamad-Eneil (Sudan) has been appointed Director of the Division of Emergency Relief Operations, which has just been set up to strengthen WHO's activities in this area.

- **Incentive for journalists.** Aware of the increasingly important role of the media in the health field, the Federation of Swiss Physicians has recently launched a Press Prize, which will be awarded for the first time in 1990 for an article written in French, German or Italian dealing with some aspect of a health problem. Worth 15,000 Swiss francs, the prize is intended to encourage journalists to produce "comprehensive, factual and objective information on the health problems of our time."

- **Health and entertainment.** Educating through entertainment is no new idea. But it has probably never been the subject of an international conference on the scale of the one held recently in Los Angeles, California, under the auspices of the Annenberg School of Communication. More than 180 health and family planning experts, together with people from the world of entertainment, showed that variety and entertainment programmes could provide a useful vehicle for social and health messages. For instance, to prevent adolescent pregnancies, to discourage the use of drugs and alcohol, to promote immunization or to help the survival of children in the developing world. The usefulness of incorporating health messages into successful television series was particularly stressed. Making use of entertainment in the cause of health is both possible and effective, the participants all concluded at the end of this unusual conference.

AZT: an update

Zidovudine, also known as AZT, remains the only drug currently licensed for treatment of AIDS. (Many drugs are used, however, to control the opportunistic infections which develop when a person has AIDS.) It has demonstrated definite life-prolonging benefits for some categories of patients with AIDS, although it has important side-effects and is quite expensive.

The results of two studies undertaken in the United States were recently announced. In these studies, the progression to AIDS of people with AIDS-related complex and of asymptomatic people with an already compromised immune system was significantly slowed, during the first year of observation, by administration of AZT.

The WHO Global Programme on AIDS is working closely with the international scientific community involved in research and will be shortly reviewing data provided by researchers from these trials and by scientists from both developed and developing countries.

MAPS IN WORLD HEALTH

The July issue of World Health contains (on pages 4 and 5) a map showing parts of Africa, Asia and Europe. The designation of the territory of some Member States shown in the published map, as well as the delineation of some of the boundaries of countries or areas, do not correspond to those used in the United Nations system, and the Organization regrets any offence that this might have caused.

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