



Research

GETTING HIGH ON HEROIN IN TANZANIA

This year the first methadone maintenance programme of sub-Saharan Africa opened in Tanzania. Although heroin is not extremely popular in Africa, its use has been growing, especially in port cities like Dar es Salaam. Drugs are transferred from Afghanistan to Europe by boat, and drug couriers may get paid in heroin. Of the estimated 25 000 drug injectors in Tanzania, 40% are infected with HIV. Besides needle-sharing, a new phenomenon called flashblood is causing HIV spread amongst addicts. The term flashblood refers to the practice of users injecting each other's blood to share the high. Researchers say this is especially common in women, who do this to share the heroin high while dividing the costs of the drug. The true effect of flashblood has never been scientifically investigated. Users do sometimes pass out after injecting blood, but since only a teaspoon of blood is injected, this could be entirely due to a placebo effect. **RB**



IS THE SILENT KILLER KILLING YOU?

When was the last time you went to your general practitioner to have your cholesterol levels checked? Over 147 million people worldwide participated in a health survey, and results showed that most people with high cholesterol are unaware of it and are not being treated. The discrepancy in awareness and treatment has dire health repercussions, since these people are putting themselves at risk for cardiovascular diseases like heart attack and stroke.

Despite the implications on health that high cholesterol levels entail, effective treatment is as simple as taking low cost cholesterol-level reducing medication. Unfortunately however, Dr. Gregory A Roth, from the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation in the United States of America who led this study stated that *effective medication coverage for control of high cholesterol remains disappointingly low*. Don't let silence get the best of you, on your next visit to the doctor, talk about getting checked, it might just save your life. **MW**

References

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- Donald G. McNeil Jr., New York Times, February 21, 2011
- RWANDA: Bloodless male circumcision to boost HIV prevention. PlusNews, February 15, 2011



Around **20%**
of men globally are circumcised



Series of controversies surround
Pope Benedict XVI

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Health policy

RWANDA: MALE CIRCUMCISION WITHOUT PAIN MEDICATION

The Rwandan government plans to expand its national voluntary male circumcision programme using a new device, the PrePex system. This system works through a special elastic mechanism that traps the foreskin, which dries up and is removed after a week. The procedure is bloodless, requires no anaesthesia, no sutures and can be conducted by minimally trained healthcare professionals in non-sterile settings, and therefore saves both time and money. The World Health Organization and UNAIDS have clinically proven that circumcised men in high risk areas have reduced their risk of HIV infection by 60%. Only 15% of Rwandan men are circumcised and therefore Rwanda's HIV prevention strategy includes a plan to circumcise an estimated two million adult men within two years. While surgical male circumcision remains the standard method of most male circumcision programmes, a few countries, including Kenya and South Africa have piloted the use of different clamps for adult male circumcision. **KV**

AIDS CONFERENCE IN THE VATICAN

On May 28, 2011 the Vatican hosted an international AIDS conference on prevention and care. It also explained its position concerning condoms as a way to prevent HIV transmission. Last year Pope Benedict XVI commented that a person, who uses condoms to prevent HIV transmission, is acting in a moral way because he cares about another's health. This caused confusion: was Benedict, in a break with church doctrine which opposes contraception, justifying condom use? The Vatican insisted he was not. The church has long stressed that abstinence and monogamous marriage are the best ways to prevent HIV transmission. A spokesperson of the Vatican stressed that the church's position about how to fight AIDS goes well beyond the question of condoms, and focuses on prevention programs in schools, the community and family level. **LH**

CHECHNYA: MANDATORY HIV TEST BEFORE MARRIAGE

Spiritual Muslim leaders in Chechnya have ordered that all couples wanting to marry must provide proof of their HIV-negative status in the form of an official medical certificate. Without such a certificate an imam cannot approve the marriage. After two wars taking place in the last ten years, Moscow drove separatists from power and Chechnya still rests on shaky peace. Spiritual leaders are gaining influence and this new demand follows last year's orders, which mandated a total shutdown of all restaurants during Ramadan and advocated harassment of all women not wearing headscarves. The spiritual leaders have no legal power but are followed because they are respected and have ties to Chechnya's leader Ramzan Kadyrov. Human rights workers say that the order is not within Russian law. The United Nations say that at least 1 million people are HIV-positive in Russia – though Chechnya has been little affected by it yet. **LH**

