



Research

MEXICAN FLU UPDATE: EVERYTHING UNDER CONTROL?

Since April, the world is alarmed about the new H1N1 influenza virus. The list of reported cases is growing, while in the meantime scientists are searching for quick diagnostics and treatment methods. The virus carries genetic material that originates mostly from swine DNA and contains some human and avian material.

The most effective treatment and protection is oseltamivir (Tamiflu). The producer has made five million courses of Tamiflu available to the World Health Organization and has licensed other manufacturers to make the drug.

Vaccine development is in its earliest stages and testing of candidate vaccines is expected to start July 2009. The majority of WHO's viral experts work on the Mexican flu vaccine now, yet the production of the 2009 ordinary seasonal flu vaccine will attract attention soon. Close monitoring of the pandemic will determine the balance of efforts between the two.

In the meantime, the suitability of the currently used *six point pandemic alert scale* is questioned. The consequences of the fifth and sixth phase are considered out of proportion for unaffected countries. **EB, JS**

PIGS DISTURB CAMEROON'S ERADICATION OF CYSTICERCOSIS

African village pigs that live in close contact with humans are the major risk factor for the transmission of *Taenia solium*. This bacterium causes serious neurological disorders in humans such as acquired epilepsy. Although *T. solium* cysticercosis has been eradicated in most industrialized countries, it remains an important but neglected zoonotic disease in low-income countries in Africa, due to intensified pig husbandry systems with infected animals.

Exact data on disease burden are lacking, but Praet et al. estimated a high loss of quality of life. The disease costs West Cameroon € 10 255 202 annually. **JS**



WORLD BANK DOES NOT REACH ITS OBJECTIVES ON HEALTH

In early 2009, an Independent Evaluation Group has evaluated the World Bank's efforts to improve health in poor countries from 1997 to 2007. It criticized the institution's work in Africa, where most of their objectives were not reached.

Although supporting the poor is the main goal of the Bank, only half of its expenditures addresses projects for the poor. Since 1997, the World Bank committed almost \$ 17 billion for projects focusing on health, nutrition and population. While once the biggest financier for health care projects, now the bank has a smaller role than many private foundations. **JS**



surrogate children in China

25 000

people living with HIV/AIDS worldwide

33 200 000

annual AIDS deaths

2 100 000



UNAIDS ADVISES AFRICAN COUNTRIES TO PRODUCE THEIR OWN DRUGS

The UNAIDS agency strongly advises African countries to manufacture their own generic AIDS drugs to ensure treatment during the financial crisis. The fear of cut offs on social expenses and distribution of drugs from developed countries, asks for further discussion about one's own provision.

It is a though objective, depending on willing governments, infrastructure and capable employees. Yet, it could be an important step forward to independence and for the entrance of African countries on the world market, says the Executive Director of UNAIDS, Michel Sidibé. At the moment, South Africa is the only African country that produces its own HIV/AIDS drugs. JS

References

- Mexican flu: WHO/CDC/National health authorities / Global Health Council / Reuters
- Pigs & cysticercosis: Nicolas Praet et al, Institute of Tropical Medicine of Antwerp, PloS Negl Trop Dis April 2009 World Bank evaluation: World Bank, IEG report www.worldbank.org
- UNAIDS recommendations: UNAIDS, news and media
- Chinese one child policy: Reproductive revolution, by BLTC Research

MEDIA ATTENTION FOR FORCED ABORTION PRACTICES IN CHINA

Since 1970, China has run birth control regulations, restricting city dwellers to one child and rural people to two if the first was a girl or disabled. Although forced pregnancy termination and sterilization was banned by law in 2002, more and more reports in the Chinese media claim that it still goes on. Besides, there is an increasing request for surrogate mothers for infertile couples. Especially these surrogate mothers are victim of forced abortions often in a cruel and dangerous way.

The womb-for-rent industry defies the country's strict childbirth laws. Officials predict more aggressive measures from the government to stop these agencies.

Recent open discussion in the media and Hillary Clinton's visit to China earlier this year raised hopes among women activists. When this problem sparks widespread social interest, there might be better chances to improve circumstances. JS



Chinese sign reading *Please for the sake of your country, use birth control*