

## Research

### HIV VACCINE REDUCES RISK OF INFECTION BY ONE THIRD

For the first time, research has shown that an experimental HIV vaccine reduces the risk of HIV infection. A study conducted among 16 000 people in Thailand proved that the risk of becoming infected with HIV was cut by more than 31%. In the trial, a combination of two previously unsuccessful vaccines was tested among Thai men and women between the ages of 18 to 30 who were at average risk of becoming infected. Half of the participants received the vaccine while the other half received a placebo. All were given counselling on HIV/AIDS prevention. During a three year period, the volunteers were tested for HIV infection every six months. After three years, 51 of 8 197 participants who were vaccinated became infected with HIV, while new infections occurred in 71 out of the 8 198 who received a placebo. Despite the promising results of the trial, researchers stress that it is unknown if the vaccine would work against the different strains predominating in Africa. **LD**

### FUNGUS KILLS MALARIA MOSQUITO

The results of a study conducted by the University of Wageningen in cooperation with their colleagues in South Africa indicate that fungi are able to effectively infect and kill malaria mosquitoes, even those that are pesticide-resistant. They also increase mosquitoes' susceptibility to pesticides.

The spores of the fungus *Beauveria bassiana* infect mosquitoes, which weaken their immune systems. This, in turn, slows the development of the malaria parasites within the mosquito and eventually killing it.

The relatively slow effect of the fungus is sufficient to block malaria transmission, as it takes up to two weeks for a mosquito to transmit the disease. As malaria mosquitoes are increasingly becoming resistant to pesticides, fungi offer a sustainable alternative as a vector control agent. Worldwide, each year more than one million people die from malaria, especially children under the age of five in Sub-Saharan Africa. **LD**



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### References

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world population in 2050

9 000 000 000

people without health insurance in USA

50 000 000

annual deaths due to lack of health insurance in USA

45 000



### FIGHTING CLIMATE CHANGE WITH CONTRACEPTION

A WHO study on population growth and climate change, led by Leo Bryant, shows that contraception advice is crucial in battling climate change in poor countries.

Carbon emission in developing nations is relatively low, so an expansion in population is unlikely to increase global warming significantly. However, overpopulation combined with climate change will worsen living conditions by depleting natural resources. Moreover, climate change may increase the occurrence of natural disasters and can force people to live in areas susceptible to floods, drought and disease.

Governments are aware of the link between rapid population growth and its environmental impact, but the stigma attached to birth control is hindering the plans to tackle this problem.

Focus on family planning is cheaper than other measures: for every £ 4 spent on family planning over the next four decades, global CO<sub>2</sub> emissions would be reduced by more than a ton, whereas a minimum of £ 19 would have to be spent on low-carbon technologies to achieve the same result. **JS**

## Health policy

### RUSSIA'S PRESIDENT CALLS FOR A CRACKDOWN ON ALCOHOLISM

Annually, Russians drink eighteen liters (38 pints) of pure alcohol, this is more than double the WHO's recommended maximum.

Nowadays, 38-50% of the population suffers from alcoholism and alcohol poisoning kills an average of 30 000 people each year. Doctors believe alcohol related diseases even cause half of all deaths in Russia. Reasons for Medvedev to call alcoholism a national disaster.

A new campaign against alcoholism is needed, like the Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev's drive to reduce drinking in

the mid-eighties. Although opponents postulate this will lead to illegal production of low-quality alcohol.

The Russian government wants to form his anti-alcoholism strategy in collaboration with religious groups and NGOs. Their goal is a reduction of alcohol consumption to fourteen liters (30 pints) by 2012. Measures taken to reach this goal include: limits on can sizes, limiting the sale of alcohol to adolescents, larger health warning labels on all types of alcohol packages, control of alcohol sales, and collecting more taxes from alcohol producers. **JS**

### A LETHAL LACK OF HEALTH INSURANCE

Harvard studies in cooperation with CDCP suggest that annually, over 45 000 deaths in the USA are associated with the lack of health insurance. This figure is about two and a half times higher than previous estimates from similar studies in 1993 and 2002 by the Institute of Medicine (IOM).

The researchers found that uninsured, working-age Americans have a 40% higher risk to die than their privately insured counterparts. This result was significant after correction for factors such as socioeconomic status, health behavior and baseline health.

The researchers think the study should prompt policymakers in Washington to consider the impact of scaling back any effort to provide truly universal coverage. **JS**