

## Avian influenza virus reappears in Hong Kong Special Administrative Region

On 19 February, two laboratories confirmed the presence of the A(H5N1) influenza virus in a nine-year-old boy admitted to a hospital in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR) of China on 12 February. The boy has recovered, but his father and sister, who had similar symptoms, have died. On 20 February the Hong Kong SAR Government Virus Unit confirmed that the father, aged 33, had been infected with the A(H5N1) virus. Both the boy and his father had travelled to Fujian Province (China) in January.

A(H5N1) was first seen in humans in 1997 when an outbreak of 18 cases caused six deaths in Hong Kong SAR. Until then, this virus had been seen only in birds, including ducks and chickens, causing high mortality in the latter. In December 1997, all chickens in Hong Kong SAR were slaughtered, as they were thought to be the cause of this outbreak in humans. No further cases of this disease were reported in humans.

WHO is in close contact with the health authorities in Beijing, and in Hong Kong SAR. The WHO Global Influenza Surveillance Network has been alerted and additional reagents for laboratory diagnosis are being made available to National Influenza Centres and other members of the Global Influenza Network.

Updates are posted on WHO's Disease Outbreak News site, at [http://www.who.int/csr/don/2003\\_02\\_20/en](http://www.who.int/csr/don/2003_02_20/en)

## Ebola virus confirmed as cause of outbreak

As of Tuesday 18 February 80 cases of haemorrhagic fever had been reported in the north-west of the Republic of the Congo, with 64 deaths. Laboratory tests have confirmed that the Ebola virus was the cause. A Ministry of Health and WHO assessment team travelled to the area from Brazzaville on 5 February.

Ebola haemorrhagic fever kills 50–90% of those who become clinically ill with it. The virus is transmitted by contact with the blood, body fluids and

tissues of infected people. In past outbreaks, health workers have been infected by contact with the body fluids of the patients they were treating. Case management experts from the WHO Global Alert and Response Network will be assisting health care workers with learning and using barrier nursing practices. Masks, gloves, suits and visors are being transported to the affected area. Medical anthropologists are also going to the area, to advise on safe practices.

Tests on blood samples from cases in the district of Kellé, where most of the deaths occurred, were all positive for the Ebola virus. In December, tests on dead gorillas north of Mbomo, the second focus of the outbreak, were also positive for Ebola.

## WHO and motorists' federation plan to improve road safety

"Unsuitable vehicles driven on unsuitable roads by untrained drivers" are the main cause of the continued escalation in road traffic deaths, according to Max Mosley, President of the Fédération Internationale de l'Automobile (FIA). At a conference on this problem hosted in London on 11 February by the FIA Foundation for the Automobile and Society, specialists and leaders from WHO and around the world discussed ways to improve safety and reduce deaths.

In 2000, 1.2 million people were killed in road traffic incidents. This makes such incidents the ninth leading cause of death in the world. In some countries one hospital bed in 10 is occupied by the victim of a traffic accident. Though more people own cars in industrialized countries, 90% of road fatalities occur in developing ones. Improving security can be expensive, but the cost of neglecting it is far higher, pointed out Gro Harlem Brundtland, WHO's Director-General: "In strict economic terms, the costs associated with surgery, prolonged hospitalization and long-term rehabilitation for such victims, in addition to their lost productivity, represents tens of billions of dollars each year."

The conference discussed policies on drunk driving, speeding, motorcycle helmets, visibility and other means of

improving safety. "Safe roads" will be the theme of World Health Day 2004.

## Fund launched to enhance food safety and quality

WHO and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) launched a Trust Fund of US\$ 40 million in Geneva on 14 February, to help least-developed countries to participate in the Codex Alimentarius, the body that sets food standards worldwide. The FAO/WHO Project and Fund for Enhanced Participation in Codex is expected to run for 12 years. Its first contribution came from Switzerland.

The Codex Alimentarius Commission was established in 1962 by FAO and WHO, and has 168 members. Its aim is to set international standards for food safety and quality and enhance the ability of its member countries both to maintain domestic standards and participate equitably in international food trade. Poorer members have been unable to participate fully in the work of the Commission because of the costs involved in attending meetings and working groups.

## WHO launches annual Move for Health Day

WHO launched an annual Move for Health Day at the first International Conference for Sport and Development, held in Magglingen, Switzerland, from 16 to 18 February. The initiative is part of a broader WHO effort to reduce the burden of chronic diseases by means of a Global Strategy on Diet, Physical Activity and Health. The Day will be 10 May each year, but the timing of events will be left to the discretion and resources of individual countries.

According to the *World health report 2002*, 1.9 million deaths were caused in the year 2000 by physical inactivity. The risk of getting a cardiovascular disease is multiplied by 1.5 in those who do not follow minimum physical activity recommendations. Worldwide, an estimated 60% of adults are not active enough for their health.

Thirty minutes or more of moderate-intensity physical activity daily, in all population groups, would solve this problem. ■