Health Headlines

Healthy Habits Before Pregnancy
Utah’s state health department has launched a campaign to help 18-25 year old women take charge of their health. The emphasis is on improving health before conception, instead of during pregnancy when it can be too late. Taking folic acid before pregnancy can prevent birth defects in the baby’s brain and spine, but 90% of Utah women of childbearing age don’t realize folic acid is needed for fetal development. The health department is focusing its efforts on educating racial and ethnic minorities, especially Latinos, who have a higher than average rate of unplanned pregnancies. (The Salt Lake Tribune, 6.2.10) Read more about folic acid.

Schools Fight Against Dating Violence
The death of a University of Virginia senior, caused by an ex-boyfriend who slammed her head repeatedly against a wall, brought the brutal realities of dating violence to many college campuses. According to the Department of Justice, 16-24 year olds have the highest reported incidence of domestic and dating violence. Stalking is also on the rise, such as texting someone 20, 50, or even 80 times a day. Schools are working to prevent and respond to dating violence by including information in their curricula, offering protective orders to minors, and sponsoring ongoing events to raise awareness. (The Washington Post, 5.24.10) Read more about violence prevention.

Chinese Baby Born with Syphilis Every Hour
In China, a baby is born with syphilis every hour, contracted from the infected mother. Syphilis is the most commonly reported STD in its largest city, Shanghai. Prostitutes, as well as gay and bisexual men, many of whom are married with families, are driving the epidemic. Reaching married men who have sex with men in China is particularly tricky because they are deeply closeted and do not socialize with gay men openly. They pass the infection to their wives, who unknowingly pass it to their children in utero. If left untreated, syphilis can damage internal organs and cause death. (MSNBC, 5.5.10) Read more about syphilis and STDs.

Cord-blood Changes Medical Practice
A study on the use of cord-blood transplants for adult leukemia patients may change medical practice. Cord-blood is collected from a baby’s umbilical cord; it can be frozen and later used by a patient who needs the healthy blood-forming cells. A study shows that when a patient needs a transplant urgently and a donor match cannot be found, cord-blood transplants have similar survival rates as those given cells or bone marrow from a non-family donor. These findings support the use of cord-blood, instead of waiting months for a donor match, when a patient is fighting against precious time. (Bloomberg, 6.15.10) Read more about cord blood and donations.

Funding Agency News

Popping Pills Between Classes
One in five U.S. high school students have taken a prescription drug without a doctor’s prescription, according to the CDC National Youth Risk Behavior Survey. Prescription drug abuse is most common among white students (23%), Hispanic students (17%), and black students (12%). Further, the survey found other risky behaviors such as smoking cigarettes, riding in a car driven by someone who has been drinking alcohol, and not using condoms during sex. Some positive trends include nutrition-related behaviors such as a decrease in drinking soda and taking diet pills. Read the press release and more about prescription drugs.

Wanted: Health Insurance
Nearly 2 million Californians lost their health insurance during the 2008 and 2009 period of recession and mass layoffs, bringing the total number of uninsured in the state to more than 8 million. That number is a 25% increase of uninsured people since 2007. The hardest hit were California’s working adults. As rates for private health insurance recently increased, the newly unemployed are forced to forego buying individual health insurance policies for the sake of making rent payments. Read the press release and more about health insurance.

Grand Challenges to Improve Global Health
The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation announced 78 grants of $100,000 each in the latest round of Grand Challenges Explorations. Grants include innovative projects such as the development of a low-cost cell phone microscope to diagnose malaria, the investigation of nanoparticles to release vaccines when they come in contact with human sweat, and the ability of ultrasound to temporarily deplete male sperm counts for possible use as new male contraception. The grants support research across 18 countries and six continents. Read the press release.

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Real People, Real Lives

Lost in Translation
Martha Jimenez made an emergency appointment for her eight-year old daughter, Linda, who had a fever and bad nosebleeds. She left the doctor’s office with antibiotics, but the directions from the pharmacist were confusing. When the bottle ran out a day early, she checked with the doctor and realized she had been giving her daughter the wrong dosage of medication. Errors in pharmacy translations from English to Spanish are not uncommon – a problem that could be potentially hazardous to a patient’s health. Martha is thankful there was no serious injury to her daughter, and realizes the importance of clear instructions between doctors and patients, regardless of what language they speak. (Chicago Tribune, 5.12.10) Read more about medical errors.

Friends With Not-so-Great Benefits
Jennifer Nicholas was surprised to learn she had herpes at age 22. The increasing trend of having “friends with benefits” is causing concern about the spread of STDs since these partners aren’t in monogamous relationships. When people have sex with a friend, especially a former boyfriend or girlfriend, termed “sex with the ex,” they tend to be more trusting and less likely to use a condom. This raises the chance of getting STDs. The most common STD in the U.S. is HPV, which affects one in four females age 14-59, and can cause cervical cancer if left untreated. (CNN, 4.15.10) Read about HPV and cervical cancer.

Teen Athletes Training Too Hard
Amanda Keane loves basketball and has the injuries to prove it – a hip surgery at age 15 and now a knee strain two years later. Kids 12-18 are increasingly specializing in one sport with dreams of making it big, leading to an epidemic of overuse injuries – fractures, tears, and worn-down joints. Amanda’s dad (also her high school basketball coach) makes her take time off during the summer for recovery. More than half of all children’s sports injuries are preventable, and cross-training is a good way to build up other areas of the body and give the overused parts a break. (The Boston Globe, 6.1.10) Read more about sports injuries.