Health Headlines

Spit Your Way to Health
Researchers have found evidence that saliva can be used to detect cancer – the biological information in your spit fluid can forecast breast cancer, oral cancer, lung cancer and pancreatic cancer. Saliva testing would eliminate the need for biopsy and other invasive procedures, making a swab test the easier alternative. Researchers are hoping for FDA approval in three to five years. (Fox News, 1.20.11) Read more about breast cancer and cancer prevention and control.

STD Testing at Home
Although up to 50% of sexually active young people get an STD by the time they are 25, many don’t seek testing because it may be difficult, costly or embarrassing. A new program called “I Want the Kit” offers free, in-home testing for the most commonly reported STDs: gonorrhea, chlamydia and syphilis. Kits can be ordered through a website, which are then mailed in a plain envelope with the swab, questionnaire, information about STDs and consent form. Patients get their results by phone in two weeks. The in-home kits allow patients to remain anonymous – a main barrier when it comes to STD testing. (Los Angeles Times, 2.21.11) Read more about the program and STDs.

Measuring Autism Risk
A new way for measuring brain activity brings researchers closer to identifying whether a child is at greater risk for autism. New tests were able to correctly identify which babies were at higher risk for autism and which were not with 80% accuracy. The biggest difference in brain activity was seen in babies 9 months old, which is much earlier than when a child usually shows signs of autism – a key finding since the earlier a child with autism gets therapy, the easier it is to improve language and behavioral skills. (CNN, 2.22.11) Read more about autism.

Cutting Down On Cervical Cancer
Male circumcision has been shown to decrease a man’s risk of contracting HIV, but it also appears to protect his sexual partners against cervical cancer. Studies in Uganda show that having a circumcised partner reduced a woman’s risk of catching HPV by about 25%. HPV can lead to genital warts and cervical cancer if left untreated, and kills almost 250,000 women in poor countries a year. (New York Times, 1.17.11) Read more about HPV and cervical cancer.

Funding Agency News

Baby News on Your Phone
Pregnant women and new moms can receive free weekly text messages with information for a healthy pregnancy and a healthy baby. Text4baby provides pregnancy and baby health tips, timed to a woman’s due date or the baby’s birth date, as well as resources to local prenatal and infant care services. Texts cover a variety of topics such as prenatal care, exercise, breastfeeding, nutrition and emotional well being. CDC is an outreach partner for the campaign, which is a program of the National Healthy Mothers, Healthy Babies Coalition. Read more about pregnancy and the Text4baby program.

Pneumonia Roll-Out
Kenya kicked off the global roll-out of a vaccine targeting the world’s biggest child killer – pneumonia, a disease that takes the lives of more than half-a-million children before their 5th birthday. The vaccine has been specially tailored for children in developing countries, and The GAVI Alliance plans to roll-out the vaccine to more than 40 countries by 2015. Read the press release and more about pneumonia.

Asthma Hits the Poor
Almost 5 million Californians are living with asthma, and a new report shows that those living in poverty suffer more severe consequences from it than those in higher income brackets. Low-income asthma sufferers experience more frequent symptoms, end up in the emergency room or hospital more often, and miss more days of work and school. Improvements in access to health care and policies that address high-risk environmental factors are needed to control a complex condition like asthma. Read the press release and more about asthma.

Real People, Real Lives

These Bath Salts Aren’t For Your Tub
During an intense high, Neil Brown took a skinning knife and slit his face and stomach repeatedly. Luckily he survived, but others haven’t been so lucky after taking a new emerging drug including MDPV and mephedrone. The synthetic powder is hitting store shelves packaged and sold as “bath salts” with names like Ivory Snow, Red Dove and Vanilla Sky. The drug can cause chest pains, hallucinations, extreme paranoia and suicidal thoughts. Neil, who had tried drugs such as heroin and crack, was so terrified by his bath salt hallucinations that he wrote to his local newspaper urging people to stay away from the harmful drugs. Several states are already banning the substance in hopes to curb this emerging trend. (The Washington Post, 1.23.11) Read the press release and more about substance abuse.

Transplant Cures HIV
Timothy Brown was given a blood stem cell transplant and chemotherapy to treat leukemia, a cancer that developed after he was infected with HIV. His donor not only was a good blood match but also had a gene mutation that confers natural resistance to HIV. Three years later, doctors believe he has been cured of both cancer and HIV. Although this procedure is too risky and too expensive to become standard practice, it might give more clues to using gene therapy or other methods to achieve the same result. (New York Daily News, 12.15.10) Read more about blood stem cell transplants and more about HIV.

Seniors Pumping Iron
At 73 years old, Sandy Palais is going strong – she does resistance training six days a week for an hour each day. She started lifting weights about 10 years ago after being diagnosed with osteoporosis in the effort to build both muscle and bone mass. New research finds that older adults who begin lifting weights after 50 may prevent age-related muscle loss, which will help provide balance against falls, a very common reason seniors end up in the hospital. Within a year, Sandy was able to compete in the local senior Olympics and now has a drawer full of silver and gold medals. (NPR, 2.21.11) Read more about bone health, falls, and physical activity for older adults.

WRITERS, WE’RE HERE TO HELP!

Need health topics for scripts? Need to talk to a health expert? Need health posters for your set?

hhs@usc.edu (800) 283-0676 www.usc.edu/hhs