Health Headlines

HIV Gel Blocks Herpes, Too
A microbicide gel, originally developed to fight AIDS in Africa, was found to have the unexpected bonus of being even more effective against genital herpes, a much more common risk for young American women. Overall, the gel reduced HIV infections by 39% and herpes by 51%. Herpes is far more common than AIDS; the World Health Organization estimates that 20% of all sexually active adults have it. Although herpes can often be controlled by drugs, it is not curable and can cause painful sores and other symptoms. (The New York Times, 10.20.11) Read the study and more about herpes and STDs.

Post-Baby Blues May Be Bad News
A recent study draws the first connection ever between postpartum mental illness and later bipolar disorder. Women who reported having symptoms of mental illness within two weeks of childbirth were more than three times as likely to be diagnosed later with bipolar disorder, compared to women whose first episode of mental illness was not in the postpartum period. This analysis implies that a postpartum mental problem may really be an underlying facet of bipolar disorder. (Los Angeles Times, 12.5.11) Read more about postpartum depression and bipolar disorder.

Movin’ On Up
Want to improve your health? Try moving ... out of your neighborhood. A recent study found that Los Angeles residents who moved from a poor neighborhood to a better-off one became thinner and healthier than those who stayed behind. Study participants were given a voucher that would pay for part of their rent so that they could move to a neighborhood where less people lived in poverty. Around 15 years later, researchers found that those who moved had lower rates of obesity and diabetes than those who didn’t move, demonstrating that where you live plays a big role in your health. (Los Angeles Times, 10.20.11) Read the study and more about healthy environments.

Funding Agency News

What’s Your Status?
A new report released by CDC states that nearly 3 out of 4 Americans living with HIV do not have their infection under control. This low percentage is because 1 in 5 people with HIV don’t realize they are infected, and of those who know of their positive HIV status, only 51% receive ongoing medical care and treatment. Improvements are needed at each stage in the process of treatment and care. CDC recently launched a new national awareness campaign called “Testing Makes Us Stronger” to increase HIV testing rates among black gay and bisexual men, one of the populations most affected by HIV. (CDC, 11.29.11) Read the report, press release, and more about the campaign, HIV transmission, treatment, and testing.

Support for Polio
The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation announced new grants to support Pakistan’s polio eradication program after the Sindh province experienced a significant polio outbreak following floods this year, accounting for nearly 20% of cases reported in the country. The grants will aim to provide assistance to polio survivors and address the urgent needs of families affected by the floods in parts of Sindh province. Progress against polio in Pakistan is critical to achieve global eradication because polio anywhere means there is a risk of polio everywhere. (The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 11.30.11) Read the press release and more about polio.

Healthy Kids, Health Communities
The California Endowment celebrates a new partnership with HealthCorps, a wellness movement with in-school educational and mentoring programs now in 54 high schools in 12 states and the District of Columbia. The curriculum will focus on nutrition, fitness and mental strength to highlight how promoting health in schools is essential to building a healthy community. This aligns perfectly with The California Endowment’s major priority to empower youth and school faculty to take charge of their own health. (The California Endowment, 10.20.11) Read the press release and more about healthy communities.

Real People, Real Lives

A Dirty Fight
Steve McMinn and his wife, Julie are just two of the Bellingham, WA residents fighting to stop the building of a coal-export terminal in their town. The terminal would ship coal to China to be burned for electricity. Not only does the burning of coal contribute to climate change, but community residents are concerned about local consequences of the mining, handling, and burning of coal as well. The sailboat-lined waterfront would be overtaken by trains, diesel particulate matter, and coal dust, and the local park will see an increase in traffic, noise and pollution. McMinn knows this is where “think global, act local” comes into play, and is working to stop the dirty business from coming into town. (NPR, 10.26.11) Read more on climate change.

Chicken Pox Lollipop, Anyone?
Kari Campbell Soto, a mother of four young children in southern California, recently took her children to a play date at the home of a young girl who had chickenpox, hoping her children would acquire the virus. She is among other parents who oppose vaccinations and prefer their children develop natural immunity rather than run the risk of vaccine side effects. Online groups are forming on Facebook offering lollipops infected with the virus, as well as other infected items such as towels, children’s clothes, and rags. Law officials have begun clamping down on this dangerous practice. (The New York Times, 11.17.11) Read more about chickenpox and vaccination.

Death by Airplane Food
Othon Cortes was on a flight from Barcelona, Spain, to New York’s JFK Airport when he ate an on-board meal containing chicken. He quickly became pale, had sharp stomach cramps, shortness of breath, and eventually had a fatal heart attack. CDC reports an estimated 48 million Americans suffer from food poisoning every year. Othon’s case is thought to come from Clostridium perfringens, a bacterium that most often occurs with improper cool down and storage of prepared foods, especially in meats, meat products and gravy. (Los Angeles Times, 12.6.11) Read more about Clostridium perfringens and more about food safety here.