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THURSDAY 30 SEPTEMBER 2004

Thai deadline to eradicate bird flu

Thailand has announced its decision to attempt to eradicate avian influenza before November. Wild migratory birds are blamed for helping to spread the virus between poultry flocks and these begin to arrive in November. Colder winter weather also makes people more vulnerable to diseases. (*Herald, Times*)

Chlamydia infection rates high

New test results indicate that as many as one in eight girls aged 16-19 is infected with *Chlamydia*, the sexually transmitted infection that can cause infertility. This means that teenage girls are 43% more likely to be infected than those aged 20 to 24. The results from the first national screening programme also show that men aged 20 to 24 have the highest rates, with one in five infected. (*BBC News Online, Independent, Times*)

Superbug clean up promised

The Health Secretary, John Reid, has promised to end two-tier hospital cleaning contracts as part of an effort to combat hospital superbugs. All contractors will have to pay cleaning staff at least the NHS minimum wage of £5.69 an hour. (*Independent*)

WEDNESDAY 29 SEPTEMBER 2004

Rise in flies will increase spread of diseases

Britain's fly and maggot population will double in the next few years due to global warming, according to a recent study. As flies carry many human diseases, such as cholera, *Campylobacter* and conjunctivitis, the rise in these pests is likely to increase the spread of disease. (*Daily Telegraph*)

Alert over rabies found in sick bat

Health officials have issued a rabies alert after tests indicated that a sick bat found in Staines was carrying the disease. Four people who handled the bat are receiving preventative treatment. People who believe they or their pets may have had contact with the animal should get in touch with the authorities immediately. Rabies is deadly if not treated. (*Daily Telegraph, Guardian*)

Legal waiver served with rare burger

The restaurant of a five-star hotel has asked diners to sign a legal disclaimer when they order a medium or rare burger, so that the hotel is not held responsible for any incidences of food poisoning. The Marriott chain has since dropped the rule. (*Daily Telegraph, Guardian*)

Healthcare errors kill 40,000 a year

Medical errors are causing 40,000 preventable deaths a year, according to Health Foundation, independent charity that aims to improve health and healthcare. Patients are being urged to challenge nurses and doctors about hand-washing prior to examinations to prevent infections, as well as questioning any changes in medication. (*Guardian*)

Human-to-human spread of bird flu

The first probable case of human-to-human transmission of avian influenza has occurred in Thailand. Health officials are insisting that the infection occurred under unique circumstances and that there is no reason for the public to panic. There is also no evidence that the virus has mixed with human flu to form a more contagious strain. (*Guardian, Scotsman, Times*)

UK may have exported vCJD blood products

Britain may have exported thousands of blood products contaminated with variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease (vCJD). The risk of contracting the human form of mad cow disease from blood or blood products is thought to be low. According to the Department of Health, more than 130,000 doses of surplus blood products were sent overseas and 12 countries have been notified of the risks. (*Scotsman*)

FRIDAY 24 SEPTEMBER 2004

Condoms backed by Catholics

Condoms should be used in the fight against the spread of HIV/AIDS according to CAFOD, the Catholic Agency for Overseas Development. Departing from the official Vatican viewpoint that

condoms can never be allowed, the agency said that campaigns to halt the disease should employ a range of realistic methods. (*Daily Telegraph, Guardian, Times*)

MMR jab rates down

Uptake of the triple vaccine for measles, mumps and rubella is down, according to the latest figures. Parents began to stop having their children immunised with the three-in-one jab after it was controversially linked to autism. Some parents opted for individual vaccines for the three diseases. The result has been an eight-fold increase in the number of cases of measles, a potentially deadly disease. (*Daily Telegraph, Guardian, Times*)

Haiti facing infectious diseases

Outbreaks of diseases such as cholera, typhoid and malaria are expected in Haiti, after tropical storms ravaged much of the country. More than 1,100 people are dead and 1,250 are still missing. Much of the north-western province is flooded, with contaminated water, damaged sanitary systems and putrefying bodies adding to the problem. (*Guardian, Independent*)

THURSDAY 23 SEPTEMBER 2004

Sheep wind vaccine

Scientists have developed a vaccine that reduces methane emissions from sheep. The jab acts against the microbes that produce methane as a waste product inside sheep and other ruminants. The methane is emitted as farts and belches and accounts for about 20% of global emissions of methane. In a 13-hour test, sheep burped out 8% less methane after just two injections. The team are now working to make the vaccine more effective and reduce the methane production further. (*Daily Telegraph, Guardian*)

AIDS success story challenged

The success of Uganda's efforts to combat HIV/AIDS has been undermined by a new survey. The National Guidance and Empowerment Network surveyed 53 of the country's 56 districts and found that 17% of the adult population was infected with HIV. This figure is more than four times the official rate. Many experts are sceptical about the results of the survey, saying that 17% was too high. However, they also agreed that the official figure of 4.1% is too low. (*Guardian*)

Britain not ready for plague or flu outbreak

Britain is ill equipped to deal with a devastating outbreak of disease, such as the Black Death or Spanish flu, according to a leading scientist. Professor Stephen Gillespie, University College London, said that the current decline in the study of microbiology risks leaving the country vulnerable to epidemics. (*Times*)

Meanwhile, scientists working for the World Health Organization (WHO) fear that a new super-strain of influenza could emerge from Asia. There have been recent cases of human flu reported in areas of Thailand already trying to contain avian influenza. Health officials believe that if the two viruses meet, they could exchange genetic information and create a new virus, as contagious as human flu, but as pathogenic as bird flu. (*Guardian*)

Malaria-free mosquitoes developed

Scientists are genetically modifying mosquitoes in order to prevent the spread of malaria. Professor Anthony James, from the University of California, has modified mosquitoes so that they cannot host the malaria parasite and some strains are ready to be tested. Malaria is caused by any one of the four species of single-celled organism called *Plasmodium* and causes more deaths worldwide than any other disease. (*Scotsman*)

WEDNESDAY 22 SEPTEMBER 2004

Thousands at risk from vCJD

Thousands of patients who have received plasma or blood products in the past are being warned that they may have been exposed to variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease (vCJD), the human form of BSE. More than 6,000 patients, mostly haemophiliacs, will be sent letters from the Department of Health explaining the risks. (*Daily Telegraph, Guardian, Herald, Independent, Scotsman, Times*)

Warning of dental health risk

The patients of a dentist, who is under investigation for not properly sterilising equipment, are being contacted by NHS Highland officials to warn them of any potential risks. It is believed that over the past two years the dentist did not always decontaminated equipment properly, leaving patients at risk of contracting blood borne viruses, such as hepatitis B, hepatitis C and HIV. Patients are being offered blood tests and counselling. (*Herald, Scotsman*)

Three wards at the main geriatric hospital in Aberdeen have been closed due to a suspected outbreak of Norovirus. Forty-five patients and staff have been struck by sickness and diarrhoea and tests are being carried out to confirm whether they are infected with the so-called winter vomiting virus. (*Scotsman*)

TUESDAY 21 SEPTEMBER 2004

Cholera threat to Congo

The people Walikale in the Democratic Republic of Congo risk contracting potentially fatal diseases in order to earn a living. Many in Walikale work in the lucrative cassiterite trade, which is controlled by the former rebel movement RCD-Goma. The group have either forced the locals into the nearby forests or make them mine or carry the cassiterite, an expensive mineral ore. There is no clean water near the mines and many people are dying from either cholera or malaria. Médecins sans Frontières (MSF) have been forced to flee the area and can only offer support through short-term missions. (*Independent*)

MONDAY 20 SEPTEMBER 2004

Meningitis vaccine blamed for rise in deaths

The vaccination campaign against meningitis is being blamed for a rise in the number of deaths from the illness. Since the introduction of a vaccine for meningitis C in November 1999, cases of meningitis and septicaemia have fallen. However, the number of deaths has risen by 17%. One reason for the rise in deaths may be the mistaken belief that the vaccine protects against all forms of meningitis. (*Independent*)

Drugs firms urged to do more for poor

Pharmaceutical companies will be told by their shareholders to do more to improve the health of the developing world. The general view is that pharmaceutical companies have not been playing their part in tackling the public health crisis. The industry is considered to have done just enough to deflect criticism over the cost of HIV/AIDS drugs in poor countries. Shareholders are concerned that this negative view will damage the reputation of the industry. (*Guardian*)

Film companies fined over unsafe sex

Two pornographic film companies in California have been fined for allowing actors to have on-screen sex without using condoms. Earlier in the year, the industry was shut down when several actors tested positive for HIV. It is believed that only 17% of actors in the Los Angeles porn industry regularly use condoms. (*Guardian*)

Illegal meat racketeers exposed

A TV documentary to be aired tonight will show meat traders selling carcasses judged unfit for consumption. The safety regime put in place after the BSE and foot-and-mouth outbreaks is shown to be easily avoided by bogus meat traders with help from an industry consultant. (*Guardian*)

THURSDAY 16 SEPTEMBER 2004

Bug closes swimming pool

The swimming pool of a country club has been closed after two adults and two children contracted cryptosporidiosis. Parklands Country Club voluntarily shut the pool as a precaution. The illness is caused by the protozoan *Cryptosporidium parvum*. (*Herald, Scotsman*)

India closer to eliminating leprosy

Four years after the launch of a campaign to provide highly effective drug treatments and tackle prejudice surrounding leprosy India has almost reached its target for eliminating the disease. Caused by the rod-shaped bacterium *Mycobacterium leprae*, infections can affect the skin, nerves, respiratory system and eyes. Through stigma and myth, many believe the disease is highly contagious and incurable. However, it is not highly infectious and only spreads after close and prolonged contact with infected people. (*Scotsman*)

Multiple checks for babies

Every baby will receive a minimum of eight check-ups before their first birthday as part of an overhaul of the health system. Officials said that the rigorous system of health checks for infants is designed to help early diagnosis and prevention of any future health problems. Many of the check-ups will coincide with childhood vaccinations. (*Times*)

TUESDAY 14 SEPTEMBER 2004

Food inspection results on the door

A new plan to cut the number of food poisoning cases each year in Britain will include

doors', is similar to existing systems in the US and Denmark. A pilot scheme is already being tried in London. (*Guardian*)

Uptake of MMR still short

Despite an increase in uptake of the measles, mumps and rubella vaccine the number of children in Scotland receiving the jab is still well short of Government targets. According to new statistics, only 88% of Scottish children are covered by the vaccine, with the target being 95%. (*Herald, Scotsman, Times*)

Hepatitis B jab increases risk of MS

People who receive the hepatitis B vaccine are up to three times more likely to develop multiple sclerosis (MS). New research looked at MS patients and found that 11 of the 163 cases had developed the first symptoms of MS within three years of having a hepatitis B jab. (*Times*)

Spas could spread Legionnaires'

Poorly maintained spa pools and hot tubs could spread Legionnaires' disease according to researchers from the Health Protection Agency. Last year, 27 cases of the disease were linked to baths, including three deaths. Out of the 88 spa pools tested, 23 contained *Legionella* bacteria. (*Daily Telegraph*)

MONDAY 13 SEPTEMBER 2004

Rabies scare in France

Hunters in southwestern France will have to start the new hunting season without their dogs because of a rabies scare. A dog illegally imported from Morocco in August died from the disease and the owner now faces a fine of £10,000 and a two-year jail sentence. Dogs have to be kept at home until 08 October and any found outside will be destroyed unless the owner can prove they have been vaccinated for rabies. (*Daily Telegraph*)

Bird flu returns to Asia

Twenty-eight people have died as avian influenza returns to Asia. Four children are in hospital under observation in eastern Thailand, just days after an 18-year-old Prachinburi man died from the H5N1 strain that killed 20 people in Vietnam. So far, all of the victims in Thailand have been chicken breeders or their family members. (*Independent, Scotsman*)

FRIDAY 03 SEPTEMBER 2004

Spiteful bugs

Experts have found that some bacteria and insects will kill near relatives to ensure the survival of their closest kin. The existence of this spiteful behaviour is more common than previously thought. Some *Escherichia coli* bacteria have been found to switch to suicide mode when food is running low. This action causes them to shower the area in toxins that kill all bacteria nearby, apart from their closest relatives, which have genes to protect them from the toxin. It is believed this self-sacrifice leaves food more plentiful for a bacterium's closest kin. Similar behaviours have also been noticed in insects. (*Guardian, Scotsman*)

Superbug strategies are weak

Experts from five institutions are calling for high quality research to find effective ways of beating MRSA (methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*). A review of past studies has found major weaknesses in research. The answers to many questions are still unknown - such as, how many isolation beds does a hospital need? How often should people be screened? Who should be screened? And who should be isolated? (*BBC News Online*)

Meanwhile, a leading scientist who helped develop a new disinfectant for the fight against MRSA has claimed that the product is not much different from common cleaners used in hospitals since 1932. Hospitals in Aberdeen and Dundee are to begin trials of the product, EcoTru, shortly. (*Scotsman*)

MRSA hits the courts

A landmark legal action is being brought against an NHS Board in Scotland for causing a patient to contract an MRSA infection. Elizabeth Miller claims that poor hygiene in Glasgow Royal Infirmary led to her infection with the potentially deadly bacterium. More than 80 more people are waiting to make similar claims, if the test case is successful. (*Scotsman*)

Cornish bay warns of *E. coli*

Precautionary warning signs have been posted beside a stream in Watergate Bay, Newquay, where an *E. coli* outbreak is being investigated. (*Guardian*)

THURSDAY 02 SEPTEMBER 2004

Labour blamed for superbugs

Hospital-acquired infections have increased since Labour came to power, according to the Conservative Party. Michael Howard, the Conservative Leader, believes that the Government has failed to take the infection crisis seriously. (*Daily Telegraph*)

Gulf War Syndrome increased toll on force

The casualty rate of the 1991 Gulf War rises to 10 per cent of the deployment force, once Gulf War Syndrome is taken into account. The Royal British Legion's ex-Director of Welfare, Colonel Terry English, told the independent inquiry into the syndrome that it was only after hostilities ended and the debilitating conditions emerged that the real human cost of the conflict was realised. Some blame the illnesses suffered by servicemen on vaccines given to them prior to the start of the conflict. (*Daily Telegraph*)

Colonel English also told the inquiry that up to one in three of the British troops involved in the recent invasion of Iraq refused the vaccine for anthrax. (*Guardian*)

Rabid puppy worries health officials

Nine people are thought to be in danger after a rabid puppy was taken to festivals in southwest France. Health officials say that 30 people have already been vaccinated against rabies, but other people seen with the dog are still to be traced. The disease is fatal if not detected before symptoms appear. (*Daily Telegraph*)

AIDS activists breach Republican Convention

Around a dozen angry AIDS activists gained access to Madison Square Gardens in New York yesterday and staged a loud protest during a Republican youth rally. It was the second breach of the Republican Convention this week. (*Independent*)

WEDNESDAY 01 SEPTEMBER 2004**New diatoms discovered**

Five new species of diatoms have been identified at the Royal Botanic Gardens Edinburgh. Professor David Mann discovered the new species after watching these single-celled algae mating in a pond. As well as having many industrial and environmental applications, they are also used by forensic scientists to determine time of death. (*Herald*)

NHS infection control

Alcohol-based hand rubs are to be placed near every patient by next April, in an attempt to control infections. Studies show that infections can be reduced by up to 50% when staff regularly clean their hands. (*Times*)

Cholera cases up

From a total of more than 530 cases, the death toll in a new outbreak of cholera in Sierra Leone is has risen to 53. Heavy rains have overwhelmed the decrepit sanitation system of the capital, Freetown, sending raw sewage seeping into the streets. (*Times*)

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