

**In brief**

**GlaxoSmithKline slashes cost of AIDS drug:** GlaxoSmithKline is to reduce the cost of its antiretroviral drug Combivir (zidovudine and lamivudine) by almost half to \$0.90 (£0.57; €0.82) a day in 63 developing countries. The company's move comes after pressure from the company's institutional investors to make access to AIDS drugs easier.

**US sugar industry pressurises WHO:** Sugar industry associations in the United States have demanded that Congress stop the country's funding to WHO after the organisation and the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization refused to back down on their joint recommendation that a healthy diet should consist of no more than 10% sugar (8 March, p 515). The US National Soft Drink Association said a 25% limit was appropriate.

**Australia suspends licence of complementary medicine giant:** Australia's Therapeutic Goods Administration has suspended the licence of the nation's largest maker of complementary medicines after an audit found that Pan Pharmaceuticals failed to test raw materials and fudged results of tests.

**Hospitals must get written consent for autopsies:** Hospitals in England should obtain clear and detailed consent from families for postmortem examinations of their relatives, under new guidelines on postmortems issued by the chief medical officer today. The health department is currently working towards publication of a draft bill on use of human organs and tissue. Details are available at [www.doh.gov.uk/tissue](http://www.doh.gov.uk/tissue)

**BMJ and MRC sponsor photographic awards:** The *BMJ* and the Medical Research Council are sponsoring new awards in the Novartis and *Daily Telegraph* Visions of Science Photographic Awards. They are offering £500 (\$795; €725) for the best images that explain medical science to a wider audience in a thought provoking, creative, or surprising way. For details visit [www.visions-of-science.co.uk](http://www.visions-of-science.co.uk)

## Canada insists that it is a safe place to visit

David Spurgeon *Quebec*

The Canadian federal health department was maintaining this week that despite WHO's warnings Canada was safe to visit. WHO last week advised travellers not to visit Toronto but was reviewing its advice on the matter on Tuesday 29 April, as the *BMJ* went to press.

By 28 April the health

department had reported 344 probable or suspected cases of severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) and 21 deaths.

On its website ([www.hc-sc.gc.ca](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca)) it advised Canadians that "travel to any destination in Canada is safe and may be undertaken in the same manner as one usually would with respect to transport, accommodation, meals, entertainment, business and family engagements, whether arriving from overseas or travelling domestically."

Health officials and others in Canada were angry at WHO's advisory, published last week, telling people not to visit

Toronto. Some people have termed the advice politically motivated and not based on science. This view was supported by the *New York Times*, which said in an editorial on Friday: "Some officials may also be trying to seem even handed in adding the West's most stricken country to the list of Asian nations where there are recommendations against travel" (25 April; p A30).

Prime Minister Jean Chrétien announced that he will hold a cabinet meeting in Toronto during the week.

Dr David Heymann, WHO's executive director of communicable diseases, speaking by telephone to reporters, denied that politics had anything to do with its decision: "We're trying to stop the spread of this disease internationally; and if we see a chance to eliminate it, to drive it back into the box ... we do that."

Dr Heymann said on Friday that the death rate from SARS seemed to be edging up, from 4% of cases to nearly 6%. But Canadian officials said the number of cases was dropping.

On Sunday Ontario was reported to have passed an encouraging milestone when the number of people listed as probable or suspected cases dropped to 95 a day from 104 a day earlier and 106 on Friday. □



Fans scoff at warnings on SARS at a baseball game in Toronto last week

## SARS could still affect the United Kingdom, health secretary warns

Lynn Eaton *London*

The United Kingdom could see more cases of severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) in the months ahead as the virus mutates, health secretary Alan Milburn warned in a House of Commons statement on Monday.

He outlined a number of new measures to try to limit the spread of the disease, including measures to reduce cross infection in hospital and checks on the screening arrangements at international airports. Airlines with flights returning from infected areas will be asked to give passengers information on SARS and to give a declaration on the health of passengers on arrival.

So far only six cases of SARS

have been reported in the United Kingdom. The last reported case was a patient admitted to hospital on 10 April, and all of the patients have since recovered. But Mr Milburn said there was still a risk, as the virus could mutate and might be spread in different ways, rather than just through close contact between people.

Patients in the United Kingdom have been advised that if they have concerns about SARS they should call the telephone helpline NHS Direct or their doctor. An assessment can then be carried out over the phone before a decision is taken on whether any further action is necessary.

GPs have been advised that if

a patient fits the definition of a suspected or probable case of SARS, the patient should be seen at home if at all possible, rather than in the practice setting.

Doctors should use gloves and a surgical mask when examining patients suspected of being infected.

Meanwhile a leading epidemiologist, Professor Roy Anderson, has suggested that the death rate from SARS might be higher than first thought.

In a paper due to be published in the *Lancet* he is going to claim, according to the BBC, that the virus kills between 8% and 15% of infected people—compared with WHO estimates of 5% to 6%. But he will say that the disease is less contagious than first thought.

He based his figures on an analysis of the cases in Hong Kong, says the BBC report ([news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/health/2977035.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/health/2977035.stm)). □