

## In brief

**Flu vaccine shortage hits UK:** GPs in parts of England and Wales have reported they have insufficient stocks of this year's influenza vaccine to immunise all their eligible patients (people older than 65 or with a chronic disease). The Department of Health has released a further 400 000 doses on top of the 14 million that GPs bought this year.

**Walking improves life expectancy:** Brisk walking for half an hour a day can help people aged 50 or older to live up to 3.5 years longer free of heart disease, new research in the *Archives of Internal Medicine* shows (2005;165:2355-60, 2362-9). Studies were based on the Framingham Heart Study and the exercise was counselled by a physician.

**Blood transfusions to be tracked:** About 50 people who have received blood transfusions in the United Kingdom are to be traced and notified of their potential exposure to variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease (vCJD). The Department of Health announced in July that blood from 100 donors might carry the vCJD agent when three people developed vCJD after receiving blood from some of these donors.

**UN staff evacuated:** The United Nations has evacuated international staff from Western Equatoria after the torching of World Health Organization facilities in the state capital of Yambio. Rising interethnic tensions, sparked by competition for land use between local farmers and displaced pastoralists, could threaten reconstruction across southern Sudan.

**University to study disease across species:** The University of Nottingham Veterinary School, which is due to open next July, has established a chair in comparative medicine, to further the study of comparable diseases in different species. Malcolm Cobb, who has spent eight years in the veterinary pharmaceutical industry, has taken up the post.

## Number of people infected with HIV worldwide reaches 40m

John Zarocostas *Geneva*

Getting the upper hand in the fight against the spread of HIV/AIDS requires a much faster expansion in HIV prevention efforts, says a joint UNAIDS/World Health Organization report on the epidemic. In sub-Saharan Africa alone, a comprehensive prevention and treatment package "would avert 55% of new infections that otherwise would be expected to occur until 2020," it says.

"It is clear that a rapid increase in the scale and scope of HIV prevention programmes is urgently needed," said Peter Piot, the executive director of UNAIDS, when he launched the report in Delhi, India, this week. "The reality is that the AIDS epidemic continues to outstrip national efforts to contain it," he said. But the UNAIDS chief

pointed out that sustained HIV prevention programmes have also "played a key part in bringing down infections" in some countries. Prevention, treatment, care, and impact mitigation goals need to be pursued simultaneously, the report recommends.

Countries also need to pour more human and institutional resources on the scale required, it says. In 2005, there were an estimated 4.9 million new infections bringing the total number of people living with HIV worldwide to a record 40.3 million, up from 37.5 million in 2003.

Despite decreases in the rate of infections in some countries, overall the number of people living with HIV increased in all regions, with the exception of the Caribbean, with the steepest

increases reported in Eastern Europe and central Asia. Also, about 3.1 million people, including 570 000 children, died of AIDS related illnesses this year, says the report.

Sub-Saharan Africa remains the hardest hit, accounting for two thirds of all people living with HIV, the largest number of new infections (3.2 million), and the largest number of AIDS related deaths (2.4 million).

On a more hopeful note, the report says that evidence shows that HIV "does yield to determined and sustained interventions," and cites reductions in HIV prevalence in Kenya, Uganda, Zimbabwe, and other nations.

In Kenya, HIV prevalence in adults declined from 10% in the late 1990s down to 7% in 2003, and included a dramatic drop in prevalence among pregnant women from 28% in 1999 to 9% in 2003.

*AIDS Epidemic Update, December 2005* is available at [www.unaids.org/epi2005/index.html](http://www.unaids.org/epi2005/index.html).

## Rates of sexually transmitted infections continue to rise

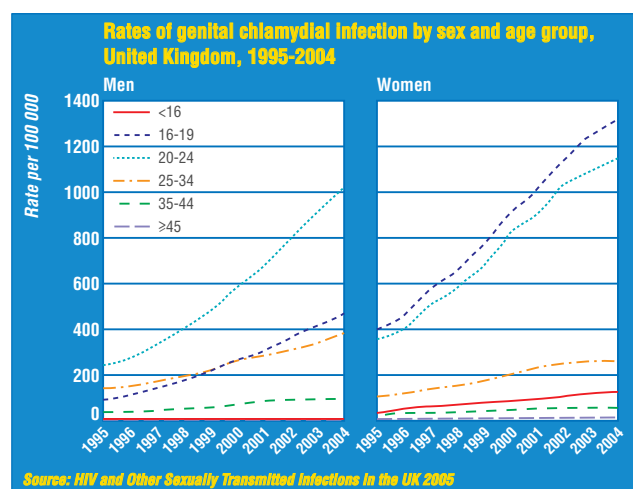
Caroline White *London*

Current efforts to curb the spread of sexually transmitted infections in the United Kingdom are failing, the head of the government's infectious disease surveillance agency has said.

Pat Troop, chief executive of the Health Protection Agency, said that the latest figures, in the agency's third annual surveillance report on HIV and sexually transmitted infections, present "a grim picture."

"The information contained in this report makes clear that transmission of HIV and [sexually transmitted infections] are not being controlled by current efforts," she stated in her foreword. "More needs to be done at a local and at a national level if we are to prevent these infections," she concluded.

The report, which was published this week, covers returns from UK sexual health clinics in 2004. The figures show that



some progress has been made in screening. More than 90% of HIV positive pregnant women were diagnosed before they gave birth. And voluntary HIV testing among gay men at clinics rose to 79%, up from 50% in 2000.

But infection data among gay men were considerably less encouraging. Estimated rates of new HIV infections stood at 3%, while cases of ciprofloxacin resistant gonorrhoea more than doubled from 11% in 2003 to 25%.

New diagnoses of HIV infection among black African people remained high. Most of these infections were acquired over-

seas, but the number of black and ethnic minority adults who probably became infected in the UK has been rising steadily from around 95 in 2000 to 249 in 2004, says the report.

Chlamydia remained the most commonly diagnosed sexually transmitted infection, increasing by 223% since 1995.

New diagnoses of gonorrhoea were also highest among young adults.

*Mapping the Issues: HIV and Other Sexually Transmitted Infections in the United Kingdom 2005* is available at [www.hpa.org.uk](http://www.hpa.org.uk).