

In brief

Salt intake targets set for children: The Food Standards Agency has issued targets for salt intake among children that are based on a new report by the Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition. The agency recommends substantial reductions for all age groups. Four to six year olds, for example, should reduce their intake from an average of 5.3 grams a day to a maximum of 3 grams. The report is at www.food.gov.uk/multimedia/pdfs/saltandhealth0503.pdf

Scientists predict swift end to vCJD epidemic: Researchers from Imperial College, London, have predicted that as few as 40 people over the next 80 years could die from variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease as a consequence of eating infected meat (*BMC Infectious Diseases* 2003;3:4). The study predicts an upper limit of 540 cases in the United Kingdom between now and 2080, compared with a predicted upper limit two years ago of 50 000. The article is available at www.biomedcentral.com/1471-2334/3/4

Cholera kills 35 in Uganda: The Ugandan Ministry of Public Health has reported a total of 277 cases of cholera, with 35 deaths, in March and April 2003 in Bundibugyo district, with most cases located along the Semliki and Lamia rivers.

New tobacco warnings increase calls to helpline: A substantial increase in calls to the NHS smoking helpline since January has been attributed to new warnings on cigarette packets. Since January warnings have covered over 30% of each packet, to comply with EU rules. In that time there have been more than 10 000 calls, an increase of 12%. Many callers had learned for the first time from the warnings that smoking causes impotence and speeds ageing.

Welsh Assembly appoints breastfeeding coordinator: The Welsh Assembly has appointed Sue Sky to implement the assembly's breastfeeding strategy, which supports the idea of exclusive breast feeding for the first six months of a baby's life.

US guidelines say blood pressure of 120/80 mm Hg is not "normal"

Janice Hopkins Tanne *New York*

New US guidelines on hypertension take a stronger approach, reclassifying "high normal" blood pressure as "pre-hypertension" and calling for aggressive treatment, firstly by changing lifestyle and then with drugs.

The National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute of the National Institutes of Health, 39 professional, public, and voluntary agencies, and seven federal agencies issued the seventh report of the Joint National Committee on Prevention, Detection, Evaluation, and Treatment of High Blood Pressure (JNC 7).

The report was presented at the American Society of Hypertension meeting in New York last week and is being published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* (2003;289:2560-72). Related guidelines from the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute are on the institute's website (www.nhlbi.nih.gov/guidelines/hypertension).

The new guidelines categorise blood pressure as normal (<120/80 mm Hg), pre-hypertension (120/80 to 139/89), stage 1 hypertension (140/90 to 159/99), and stage 2 hypertension (≥160/100 or higher). In

people aged over 50 years high systolic blood pressure (above 140 mm Hg) is considered a greater risk factor for cardiovascular disease than high diastolic blood pressure.

"The risk of cardiovascular disease begins at 115/75 mm Hg and doubles with each increment of 20/10 mm Hg; individuals who are normotensive at 55 years of age have a 90% lifetime risk for developing hypertension," the guidelines say.

The guidelines recommend that patients with pre-hypertension should lose weight, exercise, drink less alcohol, reduce sodium intake, and change their diet to the "DASH" diet (high in fruits and vegetables, potassium, and calcium). They say that the first line treatment for patients with uncomplicated hypertension should be thiazide diuretics, with other drugs added as needed to control pressure. Most patients will need two drugs to lower their blood pressure to <140/90 mm Hg (or <130/80 mm Hg for patients with diabetes or chronic kidney disease).

Dr Thomas Kottke, professor of medicine at the Mayo Clinic, Rochester, Minnesota, who

wrote an accompanying editorial in *JAMA*, told the *BMJ* that getting patients to change lifestyles was difficult. "Yapping at people doesn't help," he said.

At the Mayo Clinic several team approaches were being used to encourage patients who have hypertension but no symptoms to understand that changes now could prevent stroke or heart attack later, Dr Kottke added.

At the New York meeting doctors questioned the new guidelines. One physician said he used to tell patients their blood pressure was normal at 120/80 mm Hg and send them home happy. Now, was he supposed to tell them they had pre-hypertension, which they would interpret as a disease?

Other doctors questioned the use of thiazide diuretics as the basic treatment and then adding other drugs. Switching patients to a different single drug might control hypertension, they said. Other doctors questioned recommending drugs that might cause impotence in men. The guidelines say that doctors' judgment of treatment is important.

Professor Alberto Zanchetti, professor of medicine at the University of Milan and director of the university's Centre for Clinical Physiology and Hypertension, said that the European Society of Hypertension's definitions were more flexible. □

Exhibition aims to bring home reality of smoking

Annabel Ferriman *BMJ*

This picture is from an exhibition that aims to "steal back the techniques used by the tobacco industry" to remind people of the real consequences of smoking.

It is being held at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine to coincide with this year's World No Tobacco Day on 31 May, which is homing in on the film and fashion industries to stop them promoting tobacco products. Eighty per cent of the top earning films between 1996 and 2000 featured smoking.

The World Health Organization, which organises No Tobac-



co Day, wants the film and fashion industries to stop identifying tobacco brands, certify that there have been no pay-offs from the tobacco industry to film makers, and show strong anti-tobacco advertisements before films.

Sue Lawrence, one of the organisers of the exhibition at

the London School, said: "Tobacco advertising makes false associations between smoking and images of beauty, sexiness, and desirability. We would like to steal back the techniques used by the tobacco industry."

The exhibition runs from 27 to 30 May. □