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Study shows no link between MMR vaccination and autism

The measles, mumps, and rubella vaccine (MMR vaccine) is not associated with increased risk of pervasive developmental disorders—including autism—according to a case-control study that has confirmed the findings of previous studies (*Lancet* 2004;364:963-9).

The case-control study used the UK general practice research database—a large database of patients' electronic clinical records—to identify 1294 people born in 1973 or later who had been given a diagnosis of pervasive developmental disorder between 1987 and 2001. Full medical records—including hospital clinic letters and specialist reports—were checked for more than 300 of these people, and the diagnosis was confirmed in more than 90% of the group. They were matched to controls who did not develop this type of disorder.

Results showed that 78% (1010/1294) of people with pervasive development disorder had been given the MMR vaccine, but a higher proportion (3671; 82%) of controls, without such a disorder, had been given the vaccine.

The odds ratio for the association between having the MMR vaccine and having a pervasive development disorder was 0.86 (95% confidence interval 0.68 to 1.09), indicating no relationship. Findings were similar when restricted to children with a diagnosis of autism, to children vaccinated before their third birthday, or to the period before media coverage in 1998 of the hypothesis linking the MMR vaccine with autism.

Susan Mayor *London*

Mines still cause thousands of casualties despite ban

As campaigners celebrate the seventh anniversary of the signature of the Ottawa protocol on

Removing extreme poverty by 2015 is under threat

More resources need to be put into basic health services for the world's most marginalised people if targets to alleviate extreme poverty agreed by world leaders 10 years ago are going to be met, says a report from the United Nations Population Fund.

And despite some progress in improving the quality and reach of reproductive health services in poor countries, more than 500 000 women continue to die each year from largely preventable complications of pregnancy and childbirth, according to the report. Poverty is the main risk factor for obstetric complications.

The report is a review of the progress made by developing countries in implementing a landmark action plan to address issues contributing to poverty and ill health. The plan was agreed at the international conference on population and development in Cairo in 1994.

Zosia Kmietowicz *London*

The Cairo Consensus at Ten: Population, Reproductive Health and the Global Effort to End Poverty is accessible at www.unfpa.org

banning landmines and prepare for the protocol's first review conference in Nairobi at the end of November, they warn that much still needs to be done to clear mines and to address the needs of thousands of new victims each year.

The protocol, which was first signed on 18 September 1997, came into force in March 1999. So far more than 140 countries have ratified it, with the notable exceptions of the United States, Russia, and China.

The International Campaign to Ban Landmines warns that despite the achievement of the

ban "a global mine crisis remains, and there is still a lot to be done before we live in a mine-free world... It is estimated that there are between 15 000 and 20 000 new casualties caused by landmines and unexploded ordnance each year."

South Korea is the world's most contaminated country, where millions of mines still guard the demilitarised zone on the border with North Korea, while in sub-Saharan Africa 23 countries remain contaminated.

The campaign warned: "In many of the mine-affected countries in the region, medical

facilities and rehabilitation services are in poor condition, mostly due to a lack of financial resources."

Peter Moszynski *Gwangju, South Korea*

More information is at www.icbl.org

European Commission warns of impending HIV/AIDS epidemic

European governments must show strong political leadership to avert a looming HIV/AIDS epidemic, the European Commission has warned.

In a report prepared for an international meeting of health ministers and AIDS experts in Vilnius, Lithuania, this week (16-17 September), the commission pointed out that the number of newly reported HIV cases in western Europe has doubled over the past nine years.

The estimated number of people living with HIV or AIDS varies from 140 000 in France and 120 000 in Italy to just 1500 in Finland and a little more than 2000 in Norway. But the commission predicts that even in those countries which have to date been largely spared from HIV/AIDS, "high levels of drug related and unprotected sexual behaviour are the forerunners of emerging epidemics."

Among the 10 countries that joined the European Union in May, new cases of HIV infections have risen dramatically in Estonia (where prevalence is 1.0%) and Latvia (0.4%), compared with an average for western Europe of 0.3%.

The main challenge is to prevent the slackening of safer sex practices, and to improve access to HIV testing and health care for all, especially migrant and excluded populations.

Rory Watson *Brussels*

The European Commission's working paper, *Coordinated and Integrated Approach to Combat HIV/AIDS within the European Union and in its Neighbourhood*, is available from http://europa.eu.int/comm/health/ph_threats/com/aids/docs/ev_2004_0916_rd01_en.pdf