

PUBLIC HEALTH ABSTRACTS

Professor James S. Lawson, Professor and Head of the School of Health Services Management at the University of NSW, has prepared the following public health items from the literature.

EARLY INFANT DIETS AND INSULIN-DEPENDENT DIABETES

A meta-analysis of epidemiological studies has shown a weak but significant association (odds ratio 1.5) between infant nutrition and the risk of insulin-dependent diabetes (IDD). This study showed that IDD patients were more likely to have had earlier exposure to cow's milk and were likely to have been breast fed for a shorter time than healthy individuals. Later investigations have not supported this finding. Accordingly, breast feeding should be supported for many good reasons and current infant feeding guidelines should not be changed until much more concrete evidence is available.

Ellis TM, Atkinson MA. Early infant diets and insulin-dependent diabetes. *Lancet* 1996; 347:1464-5.

SALT-HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE LINK CONFIRMED

An international study (Intersalt) has confirmed earlier work that gives further substance to the long-known link between consumption of high levels of salt and high blood pressure. In addition, a study in chimpanzees has shown that the addition of 100 mmol of sodium to their diet increased their systolic blood pressure by 12 mm Hg. As three-quarters of the salt in the diet is hidden in processed food, a priority is to influence the food industry. As salt is the main source of "taste" this is an extremely difficult but worthwhile exercise.

Elliott P et al. Intersalt revisited: further analyses of 24-hour sodium excretion and blood pressure within and across populations. *Br Med J* 1996; 312:1249-53.

SIDS: RISE AND FALL ACCORDING TO SEASON

The incidence of sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS) has fallen dramatically in recent years. This fall has been attributed to the encouragement of the infant sleeping face up and having infants sleep in the parents' bed or bedroom. However in both the UK and Australia, despite variations in climate temperature and the reduction in deaths, sudden

infant deaths remain much more common in summer than in winter. This is unexplained but may be a clue to aetiology.

Douglas AS et al. Seasonality and the sudden infant death syndrome during 1987-9 and 1991-3 in Australia and Britain. *Br Med J* 1996; 312:1381-3.

REGULAR EXERCISE IS OF EMOTIONAL BENEFIT TO TEENAGERS

A prospective UK study has confirmed that there are benefits to the mental health of teenagers associated with regular physical exercise.

Steptoe A, Butler N. Sports participation and emotional wellbeing in adolescents. *Lancet* 1996; 347:1789-92.

ALL TYPES OF ALCOHOLIC DRINKS REDUCE CORONARY HEART DISEASE

The inverse association between alcoholic drinks and coronary heart disease is well established. A review of the studies strongly suggests it is the alcohol itself that is responsible for the reduction. Previously it has been thought it was other substances, including the ingredients of red wine.

Rimm et al. Review of moderate alcohol consumption and reduced risk of coronary heart disease: is the effect due to beer, wine or spirits? *Br Med J* 1996; 312:731-6.

DRINKING THIAMINE TO HELP PREVENT ALCOHOL-RELATED BRAIN DAMAGE

About 500 Australians develop brain damage each year because of alcohol consumption (Wernicke-Korsakoff syndrome). This brain damage is caused by the poor diets of many heavy drinkers which leads to thiamine deficiency. Since 1991 it has been compulsory for bread manufacturers to use thiamine-enriched flour as a public health measure against such brain damage. However enriching alcoholic drinks with thiamine is a much less expensive alternative – by a factor of some 36.

Connelly L, Price J. Preventing the Wernicke-Korsakoff syndrome in Australia: the cost effectiveness of thiamine-supplementation alternatives. *Aust NZ J Public Health* 1996; 20:181-7.

Rubella outbreak in Western Sydney

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programs on population immunity^{4,8-10}. In addition, surveillance of rubella occurring during pregnancy and of therapeutic abortions undertaken for intrauterine rubella, is more sensitive than counting cases of CRS⁴. None of these surveillance methods is employed in NSW. Their use should be considered.

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2. NSW Health. Notification trends: Rubella. *Public Health Bulletin* 1995; 6:152.
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4. Miller E, Tookey P, Morgan Capner P et al. Rubella surveillance to June 1994: third joint report from the PHLIS and the National Congenital Rubella Surveillance Programme. *Commun Dis Rep CDR Rev* 1994; 4:R146-52.
5. Herrmann KL. Rubella in the United States: toward a strategy for disease control and elimination. *Epidemiol Infect* 1991; 107:55-61.
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9. Edmond E, Zealley H. The impact of a rubella prevention policy on the outcome of rubella in pregnancy. *Br J Obstet Gynaecol* 1986; 93:563-567.
10. Anderson RM, Grenfell BT. Quantitative investigations of different vaccination policies for the control of congenital rubella syndrome (CRS) in the United Kingdom. *J Hyg Lond* 1986; 96:305-333.