

News @ a glance

Growing well in PEI: Children in PEI are often healthier than other Canadian kids, according to a new report from the Premier's Council on Healthy Child Development (www.gov.pe.ca/). Canada's smallest province leads the country in terms of lowest percentage of pre-term births (PEI 5.8%, Canada 7.5%); smallest proportion of low-birth-weight babies (4.3% v. 7.5%); and lowest rate of hospitalization for childhood injury (353/100 000 v. 430/100 000). Not everything in the 94-page report is good news. On several indicators, PEI children fare worse than other kids. These include the highest rate of children born to mothers who smoked during pregnancy (23.9% v.18.5%) and the largest proportion of high-birth weight babies (19.9% v.13.8%). "Our mothers are well-nourished during pregnancy — but some would be overnourished," notes pediatrician David Wong, who chairs the council. — *Donalee Moulton*, Halifax

West Nile capital: Last year, the rate of West Nile virus infection in Saskatchewan's Five Hills Health Region was the highest in North America and over 4 times the provincial average. During the summer of 2004, 224 people in the region, which includes Moose Jaw, were diagnosed with WNV. A study conducted this spring by Saskatchewan Health in conjunction with Health Canada

and the region, tested blood samples from 501 randomly selected residents in the region to determine the presence of WNV antibodies. Researchers found that 50 out of 501 adults had the antibody — 10% of the total sample. The percentage of people infected by the virus was higher (16.8%) in rural areas and 5 times greater than the risk in Moose Jaw (3.2%), which had a more extensive mosquito control program. Saskatchewan Chief Medical Health Officer Dr. Ross Findlater says "One of the most compelling parts of the study for me was that rural residents who use DEET and [wear] protective clothing were only one-third as likely to get infected." — *Christopher Guly*, Ottawa

Here come the brides: Faced with a socially destabilizing shortage of women (*CMAJ* 2004;170[10]:1527), senior family planning officials in China are considering offering welfare incentives to couples with 2 daughters, and tightening the prohibition on sex-selective abortions. Zhao Baige, vice-minister of the National Population and Family Planning Commission, says the country wants a normal sex ratio by 2020. Pilot programs in poorer provinces are offering couples with 2 daughters and no sons an annual payment of 600 renminbi (Can\$92) until they reach the age of 60. The money will also be given to couples with only 1 child, to discourage couples with 1 daughter from trying again for a boy. — *Anne Johnson*, London, UK

He shoots, he collides: Significantly fewer collisions occur when hockey games are played on international-size ice surfaces, which are more than 3000 square feet larger, reveals a new study (*Can J Neurol Sci* 2004;31:373-7). Dr. Richard Wennberg, a neurologist at Toronto Western



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Hospital, found there were 169.6 collisions during 11 games played on international rinks and 263 collisions during 11 NHL and professional games played on smaller rinks. Head injuries were sustained during 38.5 of the collisions on the smaller rinks and 21.5 of those on the larger ice surface. If these findings are replicable, Wennberg says they "would suggest that a change to uniform usage of the larger international ice surface," to prevent collisions and concussions in the sport.

Contamination and vCJD: The UK's second documented case of human-to-human transmission of variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease has led to an urgent call for new surgical instrument decontamination procedures. *The Lancet* (2004; 364[9433]:527-9) reports that a previously unknown strain of vCJD was detected at autopsy in a patient who had received a blood transfusion from a donor in 1999 who subsequently developed the disease. The first transfusion-related case was reported earlier this year (*CMAJ* 2004;170[7]:1087). The Canadian Blood Services has measures in place to reduce the likelihood of blood transmission in this country. *The Lancet* is calling for better decontamination of fragile surgical instruments in the UK where the disease is thought to be more prevalent. — Compiled by *Barbara Sibbald*, CMAJ



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