

**Smoke, not fire:** Canada is the first country to implement a national standard to reduce the fire risk of cigarettes. Under the Cigarette Ignition Propensity Regulations all cigarettes manufactured or imported for sale in Canada after Oct. 1, 2005, must meet a new standard to reduce fire risks (*CMAJ* 2003;169:223). Currently, some reduced ignition propensity cigarettes have rings of ultra-thin paper on top of the regular paper that act as speed bumps to slow down the rate of burning. The Canadian Association of Fire Chiefs reports that about 70 Canadians die each year in fires caused by smoking materials and another 400 are injured; cigarettes cause 95% of these fires.

**Allergy info:** A 9-pamphlet series on the most common food allergies was recently released by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (go to publications at [www.inspection.gc.ca](http://www.inspection.gc.ca)). The pamphlets provide basic information as well as advice on avoiding these foods, including possible sources in other products. Food allergies most commonly involve sulfites, fish (including shellfish), wheat, sesame seeds, milk, peanuts, eggs, soy and tree nuts.



CFIA

**Olanzapine case:** Eli Lilly and Company has agreed to pay US\$690 million to settle 5000 claims related to adverse effects of olanzapine (Zyprexa), an atypical antipsychotic medication used to treat schizophrenia and bipolar disorder. Statements of claim allege the drug increases the risk of pancreatitis, hyperglycemia and other pancreas-related illnesses. Company spokesperson Sidney Taurel says the "claims are without merit" and the company settled only to "reduce the significant uncertainties involved in litigating such complex cases." In Canada, class action suits are proceeding through courts in BC, Alberta, Quebec and Ontario, and a national class action suit is being sought. Olanzapine and other atypical antipsychotics have also been associated with an increased incidence of cerebrovascular events and overall mortality (see page 252). International sales of the drug totalled over \$4 billion in 2003.

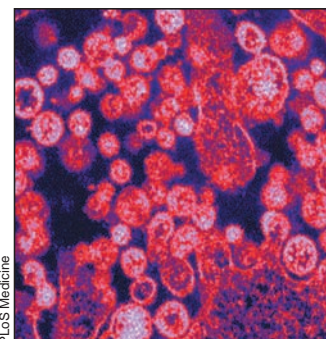
**African-Americans' heart drug:** The US Food and Drug Administration has approved the first drug ever intended for a racial group, African-Americans. BiDil is a combination of 2 older generic vasodilators, hydralazine and isosorbide dinitrate. A trial involving 1050 self-identified African-American patients with heart failure showed that the drug reduced deaths by 43% and hospital admissions by 39%. The trial ([www.fda.gov](http://www.fda.gov)) was stopped early, in July 2004, because of these positive results.

**NB med school:** New Brunswick may have a medical school within 5 years. The University of New Brunswick in Saint John is negotiating the set-up of a program with the University

of Sherbrooke Medical School in Quebec. The goal is to graduate about 40 physicians annually. Much of the English-language program will be delivered online.

**Lassa fever vaccine:** A team of US and Canadian scientists has developed a vaccine that fully protects nonhuman primates from experimental infection with lethal doses of Lassa virus. The hemorrhagic fever caused by the Lassa virus is endemic in parts of West Africa, where about 200 000 people are infected annually; 1% to 2% die, and about a third are left with various degrees of deafness. The virus is considered a potential agent of bioterrorism. The research could lead to a vaccine for human use. The team developed the vaccine using a nonpathogenic form of vesicular stomatitis virus as a carrier into which they inserted genetic material from the Lassa virus.

**Newborn mortality:** There are an estimated 4 million neonatal deaths (deaths in the first 4 weeks of life) worldwide annually. Almost all of these (97%) occur in very poor countries without national vital statistics. A recent report by Lawn and colleagues (*Bulletin of the World Health Organization* 2005;83[6]:409-17) used data from 46 studies in 30 countries to determine that about 1 million of the 4 million neonatal deaths are due to asphyxia during delivery. African women are 16 times more likely than women in Western Europe to experience intrapartum stillbirth. — Compiled by *Barbara Sibbald, CMAJ*



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