

Public Health in the News

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In this edition of Public Health in the News, articles covering:

1) Zika Warning Spotlights Latin America's Fight Against Mosquito-Borne Diseases

http://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/18/world/americas/brazil-zika-warning-rio-games.html?_r=0

The CDC has issued a warning advising pregnant women to postpone travelling to Latin America and the Caribbean due to fears of Zika, a virus transmitted by mosquitoes to humans leading to infants born with microcephaly.

The United States' decision came amidst an outbreak in Brazil where health authorities are investigating 3,500 cases of infants born with microcephaly. Brazil has also struggled to manage two other mosquito-borne diseases: chikungunya and dengue. Last year, there were 1.6 million cases of dengue in Brazil and 863 deaths.

Isaac Bogoch, a tropical disease specialist at the University of Toronto, published findings in the Lancet last week demonstrating how Zika could be spread to other parts of the world. He warned how the Olympics in Rio this summer may catalyze spread of the virus.

2) Health Canada to fast-track easier access to overdose-reversing drug

<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/government-to-fast-tract-availability-of-overdose-reversing-drug/article28196221/>

Following a spike in fentanyl-related deaths, Health Canada announced it is fast-tracking the process for making naloxone, a drug that reverses the symptoms of opioid overdose, into a non-prescription drug. The department waived a six-month implementation period to speed up naloxone's availability without a prescription.

Bootleg fentanyl, produced in underground labs and smuggled into Canada, has been linked to over 655 drug overdose deaths between 2009 to 2014.

Health care advocates have urged the federal and provincial governments to develop interventions to prevent further opioid deaths. They welcomed the news but commented that this isn't the only solution. Dr Rosana Salvaterra, Medical Officer of Health for Peterborough, Ontario urges provincial governments to make naloxone more

affordable by including it in publicly funded drug programs. At present, no province pays for the life-saving medication.

3) Mexico's Soda Tax Success

<http://www.sltrib.com/opinion/3395610-155/bloomberg-view-mexicos-soda-tax-success>

Preliminary results indicate that Mexico's soda tax appears to be working. After one year, purchases of sugar sweetened beverages is down 12 percent. Mexico has the 2nd highest obesity rate in the developed world, and sugar-sweetened beverages are a major determinant of the obesity epidemic.

The editorial calls for the US government to consider adopting similar taxes as part of a multi-pronged approach to combating obesity.

4) Prison watchdog says more than a quarter of federal inmates are Aboriginal people

<http://www.cbc.ca/news/aboriginal/aboriginal-inmates-1.3403647>

For the first time, more than a quarter of all federal inmates in Canada are Aboriginal. Three decades ago, Aboriginals made up 10 percent of the prison population, but numbers have grown year by year.

Across the country, Aboriginals make up 25.4% of the federal prison population. These numbers increase to 48 percent in the Prairie provinces.

Aboriginal women make up an even larger proportion, where 36 percent of all federal inmates are Aboriginal women.

Despite the Supreme Court decision encouraging courts to take aboriginal history into account when sentencing individuals, numbers of Aboriginal inmates continue to grow.

Advocates were not surprised by the findings. They point to cuts in social services, health care, and education over the past few years which have multiplied problems for Aboriginal groups in Canada.