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Article

Health Highlights: June 3, 2008

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Here are some of the latest health and medical news developments, compiled by editors of *HealthDay*:

Tobacco Sales to U.S. Minors Reach All-Time Low

In the past 11 years, there's been a dramatic decline in illegal sales of tobacco products to underage youth in the United States, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) announced Tuesday.

The national average of illegal tobacco sales to minors in fiscal year 2007 reached an all-time low of 10.5 percent, compared to 40.1 percent in 1997. Officials credit the decline to the Synar Amendment program, a federal-state partnership program aimed at ending illegal tobacco sales to minors which was introduced in 1997.

SAMHSA said nearly all states and the District of Columbia have achieved the major Synar program goal of having 20 percent or less of their tobacco product retailers selling tobacco products to minors. In 1997, only four states met that goal.

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In 2007, more than half of the states had illegal retail sales of tobacco to minors of 10 percent or less. Mississippi had the lowest level of illegal sales of tobacco products to minors (3.2 percent), while Massachusetts had the highest (22.7 percent).

"Although underage use of tobacco remains a serious public health problem, the Synar program's continued success confirms that decreasing illegal tobacco sales to minors is an important component of state tobacco control efforts," Terry Cline, Ph.D., SAMHSA administrator, said in a prepared statement.

Chronic Hay Fever Leads to Nasal Obstruction

People who suffer seasonal allergies over many years may experience a reduction in nasal passage airflow, say Italian researchers who studied 50 people with short-term allergic rhinitis (two years or less) and 50 others with long-term (six years or more) allergic rhinitis.

Seventy-two percent of those with long-term rhinitis had severe nasal obstruction, which meant their nasal airflow was reduced so much that it interfered with daily activities or sleep, *CBC News* reported. This reduced airflow, which took an average of nine years to develop, is believed to be due to a chronic state of inflammation, the researchers said.

"There was a slight inverse correlation between rhinitis duration and nasal airflow, and disease duration was significantly lower in patients with moderate obstruction with respect to patients with severe obstruction," the researchers wrote. "Nasal airflow was, furthermore, significantly lower in patients with severe obstruction with respect to patients with moderate obstruction."

The study was published in the June issue of the journal *Otolaryngology -- Head and Neck Surgery*.

Grape Juice May Protect Against Memory Decline

Drinking Concord grape juice may help protect against age-related memory problems, suggests a University of Cincinnati pilot study.

It included 12 adults with early memory decline who drank 15 to 21 ounces of grape juice or a placebo daily for 12 weeks, *United Press International* reported.

Both beverages were equal in calorie and sugar content, but only the grape juice had natural polyphenolic compounds that have antioxidant and anti-inflammatory properties, noted study author Robert Krikorian.

The people who drank the grape juice showed significant improvements in their ability to learn lists and showed signs of improved short-term retention and spatial memory, *UPI* reported.

The findings were presented at the annual scientific meeting of the American Aging Association, held May 30 to June 2 in Boulder, Colo.

Bottling Up Feelings May Help Some in Trauma Recovery

For some people, bottling up feelings about traumatic events may be better than letting it all out, suggests a University at Buffalo study that compared the progress of 3,000 people who used different approaches in the two years after the 9/11 attacks.

The participants -- none of whom lost a loved one or friend in the terrorist attacks -- completed online surveys in the days immediately after 9/11 and over the next two years. After that time, those who kept their feelings to themselves appeared to be in better psychological condition than those who talked about their feelings, *BBC News* reported.

"We should be telling people there is likely nothing wrong if they do not want to express their thoughts and feelings after experiencing a collective trauma. In fact, they can cope quite successfully and, according to our results, are likely to be better off than someone who does want to express his or her feelings," said study leader Dr. Mark Seery.

The study appears in the *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*.

It's important not to generalize about the "right" approach for all patients, Professor Stephen Joseph, a U.K. specialist in post-disaster trauma, told *BBC News*. He noted that other studies have found that talking about traumatic experiences in combination with counseling was the correct path to recovery for many people.

Abbott Recalls Infant Formula

Abbott has announced an international recall of certain lots of infant formula because air may have entered the cans, resulting in oxidation. Consumption of highly oxidized foods can lead to gastrointestinal symptoms such as nausea, vomiting and diarrhea, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration said.

The recall covers two lots of Calcilo XD Low-Calcium/Vitamin D-Free Infant Formula with Iron powder in 14.1-ounce (400g) cans. The cans have stock number 00378 and lot numbers 39973RB or 47239RB6 printed on the bottom.

The lots were distributed in the United States, Canada, Malaysia, Korea and Bahrain between June 6, 2006 and April 17, 2008. No other Calcilo XD powdered infant formulas are affected, the FDA said.

Consumers who bought the recalled formula should contact Abbott Nutrition at 1-800-638-6493.

Paralyzed Man Makes Virtual Character Walk

Using only his brain waves, a paralyzed man was able to manipulate a virtual Internet character to walk on the popular Second Life Web site.

Researchers at Keio University in Japan called it a world first and said this kind of activity could help motivate patients with severe paralysis, who are often too depressed to undergo rehabilitation therapy, *Agence France-Presse* reported.

The 41-year-old man has suffered paralysis for more than 30 years and can barely bend his fingers, making it impossible for him to use a mouse or keyboard.

For this study, he wore a head device with three electrodes that monitored brain waves related to his hands and legs. Using his thoughts, he was able to make his virtual character walk and had a conversation with another character using an attached microphone, *AFP* reported.

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