

Health Headlines

'The Sister Effect' on Pregnancy

A study in Norway shows that girls are more likely to become pregnant if their older sister had a baby as a teenager. The likelihood was greatest when the sisters were of a similar age or from a poorer background. This 'sister effect' is because sisters generally spend more time together than schoolmates or friends and so they are more likely to be influenced by the behavior of their siblings. This research highlights the need for policies and campaigns aimed directly at decreasing teenage pregnancy. (BBC, 8.8.11) Read more about [teen pregnancy](#).

Targeting Malaria-Carrying Mosquitoes

Ivermectin, a drug commonly used to treat head lice and heartworm, is a potential new tool to fight the spread of malaria. Ivermectin paralyzes mosquitoes if they feed from a person who has been treated with the medication, and kills them before they can infect their next victim. A new study showed that in villages where residents received the drug, malaria-carrying mosquitoes fell by 80% within two weeks. As long as it's in the bloodstream, the drug acts as a 24/7 insecticide against mosquitoes that manage to bite. Further studies are needed to determine actual declines in malaria and longer-term effects of the drug. (*Los Angeles Times*, 7.16.11) Read more about [malaria](#).

New Hope for Kidney Transplants

More than 20,000 of the roughly 82,000 people waiting for a kidney transplant in the U.S. are "HLA sensitized," meaning that a previous transplant, blood transfusion or pregnancy has primed their immune systems to reject a donor organ that isn't a perfect match. Researchers have figured out a way to erase their bodies' memory of being HLA sensitized, clearing the way for a successful transplant from a donor who isn't a perfect match. If the approach were widely adopted, HLA-sensitized patients could get kidney transplants sooner and spend less time on dialysis, improving the patient's overall survival. (*Los Angeles Times*, 7.27.11) Read more about [organ transplants](#).

Hollywood, Health & Society (HH&S) is a program of the USC Annenberg Norman Lear Center. HH&S is a free, on-demand resource for entertainment writers working on medical and health storylines. The program is funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, The California Endowment, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, HRSA's Division of Transplantation, the National Cancer Institute, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, the Barr Foundation and the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality.

Funding Agency News

Suicide Prevention in Schools

A grant for \$6.2 million is being awarded to 21 colleges and universities from The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) to assist in efforts to prevent suicide and enhance mental health services for students in crisis. The grants will support services for students with mental and behavioral health problems, such as depression and substance abuse, which may put them at risk for suicide and suicide attempts. The funds will help develop trainings, programs, and educational seminars, as well as provide a 24-hour lifeline for suicide-related problems. (SAMHSA, 8.1.11) Read the [press release](#) and more about [suicide among youth](#).

Hospitals Drop the Ball on Breastfeeding

A troubling new CDC report shows that less than 4% of U.S. hospitals provide the full range of support mothers need to be able to breastfeed, even though breastfeeding protects against childhood obesity. The report found that nearly 80% of hospitals give infants formula instead of encouraging breastfeeding, which is alarming considering that babies who are fed formula and stop breastfeeding early have higher rates of obesity, diabetes, and respiratory and ear infections, and tend to require more doctor visits, hospitalizations and prescriptions. Improving rates of breastfeeding by providing better hospital support to mothers and babies is an important strategy to improve children's health. (CDC, 8.2.11) Read the [press release](#) and more about [breastfeeding](#) and [obesity](#).

California Teens Don't Get Enough Exercise

Students in California are required to have physical activity in school, but many of them are not getting it. A state mandate requires that public middle and high school students get 400 minutes of physical education (PE) every 10 days. Despite the requirement, more than a third of California adolescents don't participate in school PE. Cuts to PE programs and exemptions to participate led to the decline, even though research shows regular physical activity leads to increased mental alertness and higher academic achievement. (The California Endowment, 5.31.11) Read the [press release](#) and more about [physical inactivity](#).

Real People, Real Lives

Sleep-Deprived Doctors

Libby Zion was jerking uncontrollably and had a fever of 103 degrees when she was admitted to New York Hospital. After she was evaluated, the overtired intern on duty gave the 18-year old girl a sedative. But her thrashing continued, so the weary intern gave her another sedative and restrained her to the bed. A few hours later, her fever shot up and she went into cardiac arrest. Libby was declared dead. Libby's father later learned that her doctor had been on duty for almost 24 hours, was inexperienced being newly out of medical school, and wasn't supervised on her case – factors that prompted a closer look at medical errors due to doctor fatigue and an examination of the components of quality healthcare. (*New York Times*, 8.5.11) Read more about [doctor fatigue](#) and getting [quality care](#).

Polar Bears on the Prowl

Horatio Chapple, a young British tourist in Norway, was on a British Schools Exploring Society trip when he was mauled and killed by a polar bear. Four others were severely injured. Although polar bear attacks have been rare in the past because of their isolated home in the Arctic, that's beginning to change because of global warming. Polar bears normally hunt seals that rest on sea ice, but their food is disappearing as rising temperatures melt sea ice, forcing polar bears to look inland for food. As global warming progresses, hungry polar bears will be spending even more time on land, meaning even more conflicts with humans. (BBC, 8.6.11) Read [more](#) about [climate change](#).

Babies Born With Addiction

Jessica, a new mother at the Susan B. Anthony Recovery Center, became hooked on prescription drugs after her husband died. With the help of the center, she was weaned off oxycodone before her baby, Casey, was born, but she still fears the long-term effects of the prescription drug abuse on her daughter, who is suffering from respiratory problems. There is a dramatic increase in babies born addicted to prescription pills that their mothers abused while pregnant. Pregnant women with these addictions must seek medical supervision to safely go off the drugs so they can be weaned off slowly, preventing the baby from going into withdrawal in the womb. (CNN, 7.27.11) Read more about [prescription drug abuse](#).

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