

## **Health Highlights: Aug. 13, 2007**

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

### **Gene Prevents Tumor Formation**

A gene that's able to stop cancerous cells from multiplying and forming tumors has been identified by Canadian researchers, who say the HACE 1 gene can suppress the growth of breast, lung, liver and many other types of human tumors.

The B.C. Cancer Agency scientists said that HACE 1 helps combat stress that, left unrestricted, can lead to the formation of multiple tumors, the *Canadian Press* reported.

Cancerous cells form tumors when HACE 1 is inactive and tumor growth is extensive due to additional stress such as radiation. But activating HACE 1 prevented the formation of tumors, the researchers said.

The findings appear in the online advance issue of the journal *Nature Medicine*.

### **Bali Suffers First Human Bird Flu Death**

Indonesian officials have confirmed the first recorded human death from

bird flu on the popular resort island of Bali, the *Associated Press* reported.

The victim, who died Sunday, was a 29-year-old Indonesian woman who had contact with infected chickens. The woman's 5-year-old daughter died on Aug. 3 and officials are still trying to determine if she was killed by bird flu.

There are fears that news of the bird flu deaths on Bali could hurt the island's tourism industry.

Since it first appeared in 2003, bird flu has killed at least 192 people worldwide, including 82 in Indonesia, the *AP* reported.

### **Italian Mayor Pays Overweight Residents to Shed Pounds**

The mayor of the north-western Italian town of Varallo has promised to fatten the wallets and purses of overweight residents who lose weight.

Men who lose 4 kilograms (9 lbs.) in a month will receive 50 euros (\$70), while women will get the same amount if they lose 3 kg (7lbs.), reported the *Daily Mail* in the U.K.

Mayor Gianluca Buonanno also said that people who keep the weight off for five months will receive another 200 euros (\$280).

Weigh-ins began last week and a number of residents in the town of

7,500 have already signed up, the *Daily Mail* reported.

"Lots of people are saying, 'I really need to lose some weight but it's really tough.' So I thought, why don't we go on a group diet," said Buonanno, who admits he's lugging around about 6 kg (13 lbs.) of excess weight.

### **Scientists Spot Deadly West Nile Virus Mutation**

A single genetic mutation causes the West Nile virus to become far more virulent, which leads to an increased risk of death in birds and likely in humans as well, concludes a U.S. study in the journal *Nature*.

The researchers also found that this mutation was "positively selected," which means that it "gives the virus a fitness advantage and enhances its ability to replicate," study lead author Aaron Brault, of the University of California at Davis, told *Agence France-Presse*.

Brault said this makes it easier for the West Nile virus to adapt to rapidly changing environments.

The study found that the death rate among crows exposed to the more virulent strain of the virus was 94 percent, compared to 31 percent among crows exposed to a less virulent version, *AFP* reported.

In 2006, 4,200 people in the United States were infected with the West Nile virus and 177 died. So far this year, only about a dozen deaths have

been reported, but the number of infections has increased fourfold compared to the same time last year.

## **Obese People Underestimate Sugar Intake**

Many obese people underestimate their sugar consumption, which means that studies based on patient self-reporting are unreliable, say researchers from the Medical Research Council and the University of Cambridge in the U.K.

They had hundreds of people report how much sugar they ate and compared that information to data from a new urine test that provides an accurate measurement of actual sugar intake, *BBC News* reported.

"These results show what many have suspected for some time: obese people are not able to tell us what they actually eat," said research team leader Professor Sheila Bingham. "If we are to tackle the scourge of obesity, both exercise and diet need to be taken into account."

The study appears in the journal *Cancer Epidemiology, Biomarkers and Prevention*.

Some previous studies that suggested no link between sugar consumption and obesity relied on patient self-reporting, *BBC News* reported. But the conclusions of those studies were based on inaccurate data, Bingham and her colleagues said.

## **Biodegradable Patch Fixes Common Heart Defect**

A method of promoting the body's natural healing power that can correct a common heart defect called patent foramen ovale (PFO) is being used by doctors at the Royal Brompton Hospital in London, England.

One in four people has this valve-like hole in the heart, which is linked with an increased risk of stroke and migraine, *BBC News* reported. PFO can be closed surgically using a graft, but this approach can cause damage to surrounding tissue.

This new technique uses a bioabsorbable patch that acts as a temporary plug. Within about 30 days, the body replaces the patch with healthy normal tissue.

So far, the patch has been used in about 70 patients at Royal Brompton Hospital, *BBC News* reported.

"Traditional grafts are permanent and so can cause an inflammatory reaction, which can lead to problems," said consultant cardiologist Michael Mullen. "Instead, this (patch) treatment does the repair job and then disappears in a natural way. The healing is very similar to how the body would heal itself normally."

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