

HEALTH BRIEFS

FOR KIDS ON THE GO, DON'T FORGET THE H₂O

HOUSTON— Parents need to make sure children have plenty of water when they venture outside in the sweltering heat this summer. "Kids can become dehydrated very quickly," said Dr. Robert Shulman, professor of pediatrics at Baylor College of Medicine and director of the nutritional support team at Texas Children's Hospital in Houston. In addition to water, sports drinks and fruit juices are also good to give children. It is best to stay away from drinks that contain high levels of caffeine. Caffeine is known to increase the flow of urine, so instead of replenishing the body, it can contribute to dehydration. Dehydration can cause a child to become dizzy or drowsy, develop headaches and a dry mouth, and in severe cases become unconscious. Keep in mind, infants should never be exposed to the sun for long periods of time, and never placed in direct sunlight. Always dress them in light-colored clothing and put a hat on their head. A light blanket can also protect their arms and legs.

PARENTS NEED TO PAY ATTENTION WHEN CHILDREN ARE IN THE WATER

HOUSTON — Children and water can be a deadly summer combination. "It's a sad fact that thousands of children drown annually, and 80 to 95 percent of these deaths occur between Memorial Day and Labor Day," said Dr. Joan Shook, a pediatric emergency-room physician at Baylor College of Medicine and Texas Children's Hospital in Houston. Almost 100 percent of child drownings are preventable. It is important that children know how to swim before going in the water because they cannot react quickly enough to danger. Parents should always keep an eye on children in the water, and never rely on blow-up toys or other inflatable devices to prevent a drowning. "It's tragic when a child dies, but even more so when the death was preventable," said Shook.

OLD MAKEUP CAN CAUSE SERIOUS EYE INFECTIONS

HOUSTON — Cosmetics designed to give women an eye-opening appearance can cause serious eye infections. "Eyelashes naturally contain bacteria and as soon as you use a makeup brush on the eyelash or eyelid, the brush is contaminated," said Dr. Alice Matoba, associate professor of ophthalmology at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston and an attending physician at The Methodist Hospital. Over time, this leads to a buildup of bacteria in the cosmetic container, increasing the chance for an eye infection or an allergic reaction with each use of the product. There are no guidelines for cosmetics use, but the risk of infection can be reduced if you change them out every three to four months.

TEENAGE CANCER PATIENTS LEARN TO LOOK GOOD

HOUSTON — A program called "Look Good, Feel Better" is designed to help young cancer patients better cope with medications that affect their appearance. "The program offers makeup and hair-loss advice for girls as well as skin care sessions for boys," said social worker Michelle Fritsch at the Texas Children's Cancer Center at Baylor College of Medicine and Texas Children's Hospital in Houston. "Teens meet twice a year for a two-hour program that also includes presentations on nutrition, fitness and social skills." A special game is also part of the program. It teaches kids how to respond to awkward social moments, and how to handle their peers' curiosity and questions. Kids can also gather tips on how to select wigs, and tie scarves. The program also helps kids because they can talk with others who understand what they are going through.

NEW PROCEDURE CAN SHRINK OVERGROWN HEART MUSCLE

HOUSTON— A new nonsurgical procedure using alcohol to prevent a common heart defect has been developed by cardiologists at The DeBakey Heart Center at Baylor College of Medicine and The Methodist Hospital in Houston. Patients with hypertrophic cardiomyopathy, an inherited disease which is caused by an enlarged heart muscle, are benefitting from the new procedure. "We can reduce the bulk of the muscle by injecting 200-proof alcohol into the appropriate artery after a balloon is inserted," said Dr. William Spencer, a Baylor professor of medicine and director of Baylor's Clinical Cardiology Center. "The balloon prevents the alcohol from flowing back and killing the needed muscle while the overgrown muscle is killed." More than 500,000 Americans suffer from hypertrophic cardiomyopathy, the most common cause of sudden death in young athletes.

HEALTH

New sickle cell treatment seems promising

Special to Sentinel-Voice
WASHINGTON — Sickle cell anemia, a crippling, painful and sometimes lethal disease most prevalent among black people, eventually may be controlled by a new type of genetic therapy, researchers say.

Duke University scientists report in a study that they were able to change sickled blood cells into normal cells using proteins that snip, clip and correct mutated genetic instructions.

Dr. Bruce Sullenger of Duke University, lead author of the study in the journal Science, said that the new technique does not change the mutated genes but rather corrects the instructions in a molecule that carries the

genetic message to make hemoglobin protein.

A cell makes proteins, including those for red blood cells, based on the blueprint contained in the genes. The protein instructions are carried within the cell by a molecule called RNA.

In the Duke experiments, Sullenger said the sickle cell mutation was corrected by changing the instructions contained in the RNA molecule. Other attempts at gene therapy have targeted the genes that write the instructions instead of the RNA that carries the instructions to the cell.

Sickle cell anemia is a genetic disorder that causes the production of an abnormal type of hemoglobin, the molecule in red blood cells that carries

oxygen to all the cells in the body.

Cells with sickle-shaped hemoglobin are fragile and easily destroyed and do not circulate with the ease of normal, rounded hemoglobin cells. This can cause stroke, kidney disease, swollen and painful joints and difficulty in breathing. Death often is caused when blood flow is cut off to vital organs.

Sickle cell disease was once lethal at an early age, but now patients treated with blood transfusions and other therapies often live past age 40.

Eight to thirteen percent of Americans whose ancestors came from Africa or the Middle East carry at least one sickle cell gene. However, both genes

that make hemoglobin must be mutated for the disease to occur. About one-third of one percent of all blacks in America have the disease.

In the Duke study, scientists created a "ribozyme," a type of enzyme that can clip and correct the message carried in RNA, to fix sickled hemoglobin in a test tube and in laboratory dishes. The work has not been tested yet in animals or humans.

Sullenger said his team mixed the ribozyme carrying the normal hemoglobin pattern with immature red blood cells that carried the sickled pattern. He said the ribozymes cut out the mutated instructions and replaced them with the correct genetic pattern. The result: red

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Study: Cap on welfare increased N.J. abortions

Special to Sentinel-Voice
TRENTON, N.J. — Welfare mothers who no longer received an additional \$64 per month for each new child would stop having children, a new Rutgers University study says.

But researchers who conducted the \$1 million study discovered an unintended consequence of the 1992 New Jersey welfare law: more abortions.

State officials have rejected the findings, criticizing the report's methodology and declaring it a "draft" instead of a finished product. They have asked researchers for revisions.

The December 1997 report, commissioned by the state Department of Human Services, revealed that the 1992 law "does appear to exert a small but nontrivial effect on abortion rates, adding about 240 abortions per year over what would be expected due to trend and population composition changes."

The report also said the law has had "a small effect" on the birth rate, with welfare recipients having 140 fewer children a year compared with what would normally be expected.

The report also suggests that black women have been more affected by the law than other racial groups. Abortions among black women on welfare exceeded births from March 1993 until at least September of 1996, while the abortion rate for white and Hispanic women increased only slightly.

New Jersey was the first state to enact such a restriction. Twenty other states have since adopted similar measures, and the Rutgers report is likely to fan the flames of the national

debate over welfare reform.

Groups on opposite sides of the abortion issue have formed an unlikely alliance to try to repeal the cap law in New Jersey. They pointed to the report's figures Monday as a clear indication that the law is flawed.

"The state is saying on one hand to women, 'We will not

give you child support. However, we will pay for an abortion.' That's very discriminatory," said Marie Tasy, director of public and legislative affairs for New Jersey Right to Life.

"A poor woman faced with that choice is left with very little option," said Lenora Lapidus, legal director of the

American Civil Liberties Union of New Jersey. Lapidus is a co-counsel in a lawsuit brought against the state last year, claiming the family cap law is discriminatory and violates women's privacy and reproductive rights.

Welfare recipients in general have abortions at a

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