

Health Highlights: Jan. 13, 2011

Americans Need to Cut Salt Intake, Heart Experts Say
Combo High Blood Pressure Pill Beats Single Drug: Study
EPA Issues Recommendations for Chromium-6 in Tap Water
WHO Targets Drug-Resistant Malaria

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

Americans Need to Cut Salt Intake, Heart Experts Say

Steps must be taken to reduce Americans' sodium (salt) consumption to less than 1,500 milligrams per day, says an American Heart Association advisory issued Thursday.

The call to action is directed at the public, health professionals, the food industry and government. The advisory, published in the journal *Circulation*, says that consuming more than 1,500 mg of sodium per day can lead to elevated blood pressure and increased risk of stroke, heart attack and kidney disease.

Currently, daily sodium consumption in the United States is more than two times higher than the recommended upper limit of 1,500 mg, with packaged, processed and restaurant foods accounting for 77 percent of that consumption, according to the AHA.

"Even a modest decline in intake -- say 400 mg per day -- would produce benefits that are substantial and warrant implementation," wrote the advisory authors.

Combo High Blood Pressure Pill Beats Single Drug: Study

Using two drugs to treat high blood pressure is more effective than a single drug, according to a new study.

Researchers followed 1,254 patients with high blood pressure in 10 countries who received a single drug (either aliskiren or amlodipine) or a combination of the two drugs, *BBC News* reported.

The patients who took the combination of drugs had a 25 percent better response over six months and had fewer side effects than those who took a single drug.

The study, published in *The Lancet*, was funded by Novartis, which makes amlodipine and aliskiren.

"This study adds significantly to the evidence that starting treatment for patients with high blood pressure with two medicines rather than one is safe, and more effective than waiting to add the second medicine later," Jeremy Pearson, associate medical director at the British Heart Foundation, told *BBC News*.

The combination pill was approved last year by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration.

EPA Issues Recommendations for Chromium-6 in Tap Water

New recommendations for monitoring levels of the potentially cancer-causing chemical chromium-6 in drinking water have been released by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

The move comes several weeks after the Environmental Working Group said it found the chemical in the tap water of 31 of 35 cities from which samples were collected and tested, *ABC News* reported.

Under current EPA rules, water systems only need to test for the presence of total chromium, which includes chromium-6. The updated EPA recommendations call for collection and sampling at more points throughout water distribution systems and more frequent testing.

"As we continue to learn more about the potential risks of exposure to chromium-6, we will work closely with states and local officials to ensure the safety of America's drinking water supply," said EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson, *ABC News* reported.

WHO Targets Drug-Resistant Malaria

A global plan to fight drug-resistant malaria was launched Wednesday by the World Health Organization.

It said failure to combat the spread of resistance to artemisinin -- a key component of new malaria drugs -- would be "catastrophic," *Agence France-Presse* reported.

Drug-resistant malaria has appeared in areas on the Cambodia-Thailand border and may have spread to other areas in Cambodia, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam. More than \$175 million will be required for research and to contain resistance in these regions, the WHO said.

It also called for increased surveillance of drug resistant malaria, noting that in 2010 only 31 of 75 countries routinely conducted tests on the effectiveness of malaria drugs, *AFP* reported.

"The emergence of artemisinin resistance has been a wake-up call. It gives us another compelling reason to step up existing control measures with the greatest sense

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of urgency," said WHO Director-General Margaret Chan.

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