

Health

Malaysia vaccinating for polio

Experts warn of emerging risk of deadly Nipah virus

LONDON, Dec 9, (Agencies): A deadly virus called Nipah carried by bats has already caused human outbreaks across South and South East Asia and has "serious epidemic potential", global health and infectious disease specialists said on Monday.

The virus, identified in 1999 in Malaysia and Singapore, has sparked outbreaks with mortality rates of between 40% and 90% and spread thousands of kilometres to Bangladesh and India – yet there are no drugs or vaccines against it, they said.

"Twenty years have passed since its discovery, but the world is still not adequately equipped to tackle the global health threat posed by Nipah virus," said Richard Hatchett, chief executive of the CEPI Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations, which is co-leading a Nipah conference this week in Singapore.

CEPI, a partnership between disease experts, and public, private, philanthropic, and civil organisations, was set up in 2017 to try to speed up the development of vaccines against newly emerging and unknown infectious diseases.

Among its first disease targets is Nipah, a virus carried primarily by certain types of fruit bats and pigs, which can also be transmitted directly from person to person as well as through contaminated food.

Within two years of being first discovered, Nipah had spread to Bangladesh, where it has caused several outbreaks since 2001. A 2018 Nipah outbreak in Kerala, India, killed 17 people.

"Outbreaks of Nipah virus have so far been confined to South and Southeast Asia, but the virus has serious epidemic potential, because Pteropus fruit bats that carry the virus are found throughout the tropics and sub-tropics, which are home to more than two billion people," Hatchett said.

He said since Nipah can also pass from person to person, it could, in theory, also spread into densely populated areas too.

The two-day Nipah conference, the first to focus on this deadly virus, is being co-hosted by CEPI and the Duke-NUS Medical School in Singapore and starts on Monday.

"There are currently no specific drugs or vaccines for Nipah virus infection, even though the World Health Organization has identified (it) as a priority disease," said Wang Linfa, a Duke NUS professor and co-chair of the conference. He hoped the meeting would stimulate experts to find ways of finding Nipah.

Polio: Malaysia began a vaccination campaign in a rural town on Borneo island after a 3-month-old boy was confirmed to have polio in the country's first case of the highly infectious virus in 27 years.

The infant from Tuaran town in Sabah state tested positive for vaccine-derived polio virus type 1 on Friday after he was hospitalized with fever and muscle weakness. He is on respiratory support but his condition is stable, Health Minister Dzulkefly Ahmad said in a statement Monday.

Malaysia is the second Asian

country to have reported a polio case after an outbreak in the Philippines in September. The World Health Organization says polio, which has been largely eradicated, remains endemic in only Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Dzulkefly said tests showed the baby's strain had genetic links to the polio virus detected in Philippines and investigations are ongoing to determine the cause of the infection. Malaysia's last polio case occurred in 1992 and the country was declared polio-free in 2000.

The health ministry said the strain was believed to have originated from a weakened virus contained in oral polio vaccine that was excreted from the body through feces and possibly spread in an unsanitary environment to those who haven't been immunized.

Dzulkefly said Malaysia switched from oral vaccine to inactivated polio vaccine since 2008, that is given to children via injection in a combination with several vaccines for other infectious diseases including diphtheria, pertussis and tetanus.

The government fully halted the use of oral vaccine three years ago, but he stressed the country has not had any reports of vaccine-derived polio cases from the use of over 80 million doses of the oral vaccine.

"The first polio case since Malaysia was polio-free upset us," Dzulkefly said.

Vaccination has been stepped up in the infant's home village after investigations showed 25 out of 204 children, aged between 2 months and 15 years, were not vaccinated against polio, he said.

"All of these children are non-citizens and have been given polio vaccines. This activity is being expanded to other risky areas to prevent transmission," he said. Officers are also educating villagers about polio and preventive measures, he said.

Ebola: An Ebola survivor has fallen ill with the disease for a second time in eastern Congo, the Congolese health authorities said on Sunday, saying it was not yet clear if it was a case of relapse or reinfection.

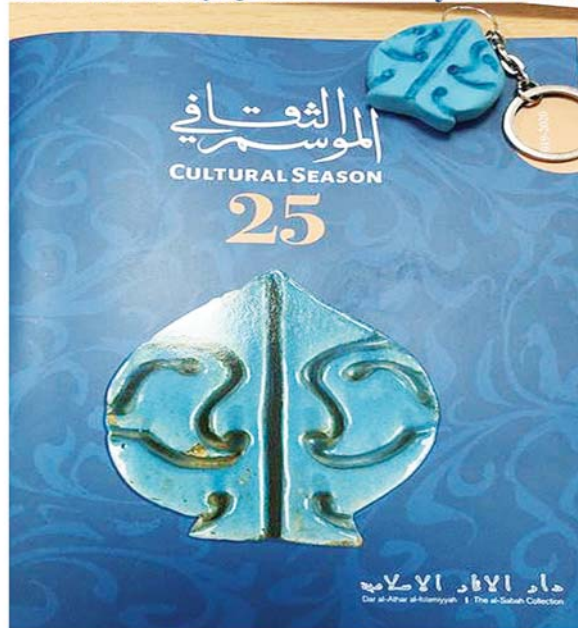
The Ebola outbreak in Democratic Republic of Congo has infected over 3,300 people and killed more than 2,200 since the middle of last year, making it the second worst year on record.

Experts say there has been a working assumption that Ebola survivors generally have immunity from the disease. There have been no documented cases of reinfection but some researchers consider it to be at least a theoretical possibility, while the recurrence of a previous infection is considered extremely rare.

In a recent report on the epidemic, the Congolese health authorities reported that a survivor in Malakou, North Kivu province, had fallen ill with the virus again, but did not give further details.

Representatives of the World Health Organization and Congo's National Institute of Biomedical Research (INRB) said tests were being carried out to determine what had happened.

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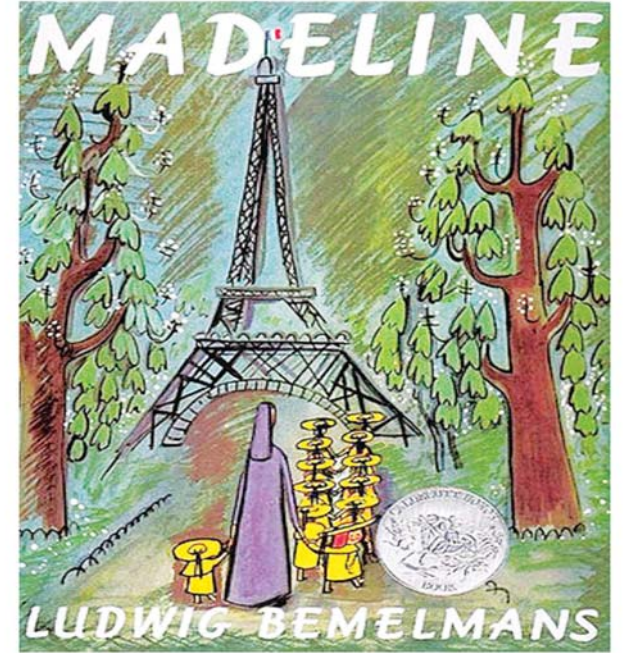
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Post-exercise cooling actually impedes muscle building

Ice bath may not improve fitness

NEW YORK, Dec 9, (RTRS): New research throws cold water on a popular exercise recovery regimen, finding that ice baths after a workout may actually impede muscle building.

Researchers found that cold or ice baths can impede the generation of new protein in the muscles, according to the report published in the *Journal of Physiology*.

"The take-home message from our study is that athletes aiming to grow and/or repair their muscles should avoid cold water immersion after exercise," said study leader Cas Fuchs, a researcher at Maastricht University in the Netherlands.

Athletes often assume that cooling is good for recovery after a workout because they say "they feel" better after post-exercise cooling," Fuchs told Reuters Health by email. "They feel less muscle soreness and believe that they are able to recover faster, and thereby being able to exercise faster again."

But feelings can be deceptive, Fuchs said. While cooling can knock-back muscle swelling and soreness, "in our study we found that post-exercise cooling lowers the ability of our muscles to make new proteins that are essential to repair and build our muscles," he explained. "Therefore, if you want to repair and grow your muscles after a workout, it is smart to avoid cooling."

Workouts

To take a closer look at the impact of a cold or iced bath after workouts, Fuchs and his colleagues recruited 12 healthy young men, with an average age of 21, for a series of experiments. After the men did some lower-body weight lifting – leg presses and extensions – they were asked to place one leg in icy water and the other in room temperature water. Afterward, the men consumed a protein drink.

When the researchers examined muscle biopsies from the men's legs, they found less protein synthesis in the cooled leg than in the one that had been in room-temperature water. "Less muscle protein synthesis very likely translates into less muscle building in the long-term," Fuchs said.

Children eating between meals get more fruits, protein

Kids who snack may have better-quality diets

NEW YORK, Dec 9, (RTRS): Children who eat between meals may be getting fruits and other elements of a healthy diet that they would not otherwise eat, a small study of kids' diet quality suggests.

Researchers examined data on eating habits among 150 families in Minneapolis-St Paul, Minnesota, with children 5 to 7 years old. The study team surveyed participants on three separate occasions about what they ate and drank over the previous 24 hours.

When researchers only looked at meals kids ate, children had an average so-called Healthy Eating Index (HEI) score of 55.3 out of a possible 100 points for an optimal diet, the study found. But when researchers also looked at snacks, kids' average scores rose to 57.1.

"Among the children included in the current study, snacking was found to contribute positively to overall diet quality," lead study author Katie Loth of the University of Minnesota and colleagues write in the *Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics*.

"However, snacking was also found to contribute to children's mean consumption of refined grains and sugar sweetened beverages," Loth and colleagues write.

With only meals counted, children

averaged 3.9 servings of refined grains like white bread and 0.4 servings of sugary beverages like sodas and fruit drinks, the study found.

Including snacks, kids got 5 daily servings of refined grains and 0.54 daily servings of sugary drinks.

Children in the study got an average of 1,215 calories a day from meals alone, and an average of 1,581 daily calories when researchers looked at both meals and snacks.

Including snacks, children got an average of 1.08 servings of fruit, 1.29 servings of vegetables, 4.26 servings of protein, and 2.15 servings of dairy each day, the study found.

Counting only meals, they averaged barely two-thirds of a serving of fruit daily, 3.88 servings of protein, and 0.59 servings of vegetables, suggesting that snacks can help kids get more of the healthy foods they need, the study team writes.

Snacking appeared to make a bigger difference in overall diet quality for boys than for girls. Excluding snacks from diet analysis contributed to a 2.5-point drop in diet quality scores for boys but just a 1-point dip for girls.

The impact of snacking on diet quality also appeared to vary for different racial and ethnic groups. Diet scores with and without

snacks were similar for African-American children, at about 49, the study found. Average diet scores rose from 59.1 with meals only to 61.1 including snacks for Hispanic kids; from 53.4 to 54.7 for Hmong children; from 53.4 to 56 for Native American kids; from 60.2 to 62.7 for Somali youth; and from 56.7 to 58.6 for white children.

The study wasn't a controlled experiment designed to prove whether or how snacking might directly improve diet quality or health outcomes for children.

Beyond its small size, another limitation of the study is the potential for parents to provide inaccurate or incomplete information about kids' eating habits in dietary surveys, the study team notes. It's also possible results would be different elsewhere, or for other racial or ethnic groups.

"Future research should seek to better understand influences on children's food choices at snack times and barriers to serving more healthful foods as snacks that are faced by ethnically or racially diverse families," the study team concludes.

"Long term, the development of interventions that aim to improve children's consumption of healthful foods at snack times should be pursued," the researchers add.

can train the next day."

This article suggests "that unless there is an injury, like a muscle pull or tendonitis, this is not the best way to recover and it potentially hinders muscle building," Leber said. "They feel that it's possible that cold water baths are not doing what we intend them to do."

But, said Leber, "the study has a huge limitation: there are just 12 athletes. Plus, they are only testing resistance training not aerobic exercise."

And while it might be argued that

the findings would be pertinent for weight lifters, "they are not typically the ones who are going to use ice water baths," Leber said, adding that ice water baths are more typically used by people doing sports such as soccer and football.

Leber would like to see more studies on the topic. "It's an interesting possibility for future research, she said. "Maybe we will need to find a way for better recovery than just ice water baths after exercise."

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