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Blood tied to risk ... O may help, A hurt

WHO hails new coronavirus drug

WASHINGTON, June 18, (Agencies): A genetic analysis of COVID-19 patients suggests that blood type might influence whether someone develops severe disease.

Scientists who compared the genes of thousands of patients in Europe found that those who had Type A blood were more likely to have severe disease while those with Type O were less likely.

Wednesday's report in the New England Journal of Medicine does not prove a blood type connection, but it does confirm a previous report from China of such a link.

"Most of us discounted it because it was a very crude study," Dr Parameswar Hari, a blood specialist at the Medical College of Wisconsin, said of the report from China. With the new work, "now I believe it," he said. "It could be very important."

Other scientists urged caution.

The evidence of a role for blood type is "tentative ... it isn't enough of a signal to be sure," said Dr Eric Topol, head of the Scripps Research Translational Institute in San Diego.

The study, involving scientists in Italy, Spain, Denmark, Germany and other countries, compared about 2,000 patients with severe COVID-19 to several thousand other people who were healthy or who had only mild or no symptoms. Researchers

tied variations in six genes to the likelihood of severe disease, including some that could have a role in how vulnerable people are to the virus. They also tied blood groups to possible risk.

Most genetic studies like this are much larger, so it would be important to see if other scientists can look at other groups of patients to see if they find the same links, Topol said.

Many researchers have been hunting for clues as to why some people infected with the coronavirus get very ill and others, less so. Being older or male seems to increase risk, and scientists have been looking at genes as another possible "host factor" that influences disease severity.

There are four main blood types - A, B, AB and O - and "it's determined by proteins on the surface of your red blood cells," said Dr Mary Horowitz, scientific chief at the Center for International Blood and Marrow Transplant Research.

People with Type O are better able to recognize certain proteins as foreign, and that may extend to proteins on virus surfaces, Hari explained.

During the SARS outbreak, which was caused by a genetic cousin of the coronavirus causing the current pandemic, "it was noted that people with O blood type were less likely to get severe disease," he said.

Blood type also has been tied to susceptibility to some other infectious diseases, including cholera, recurrent urinary tract infections from E. coli, and a bug called H. pylori that can cause ulcers and stomach cancer, said Dr David Valle, director of the Institute of Genetic Medicine at Johns Hopkins University.

Bottom line: "It's a provocative study. It's in my view well worth publishing and getting out there," but it needs verification in more patients, Valle said.

New drug hailed

The World Health Organization (WHO) has welcomed initial positive results by a team from Oxford University on how Dexamethasone drug contributed to lesser death cases among coronavirus patients, who needed ventilators.

WHO Director General Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, at an online news conference in Geneva, hailed the accomplishment but said the drug nevertheless showed effectiveness in treating less critical cases.

Dexamethasone has been in use since 1969 and is used to treat inflammation and some types of cancer.

A study, conducted by researchers from the University of Oxford, stated that the drug, which costs five pounds (\$6.32) and is anabolic steroids for the treatment of various infections, succeeded in reducing deaths by about a third among patients who needed ventilators.

Up to 2,014 patients were given a dose of six milligrams per day for 10 days, and the tests were compared after 28 days with a group of 4,321 patients who received a different experimental treatment and the results were amazing, it added.

Ghebreyesus, meanwhile, said 85,000 coronavirus cases were registered two months after the outbreak of the pandemic but six million more were registered in the past two months.

But global solidarity can contribute to the defeat of the pandemic, he said.

WHO has been calling on countries to conduct tests, isolate infectees and trace those who came into close contact with them, follow hygienic principles and physical distancing.

Priority populations

The chief scientist at the World Health Organization says the agency hopes there will be about 2 billion doses of a vaccine against COVID-19 by the end of next year that would be reserved for "priority populations."

Dr Soumya Swaminathan told a press briefing: "It's a big if because we don't have any vaccine that's proven."

She said that because of the numerous vaccine candidates currently being tested, WHO hoped at least some might prove ready for use next year.

Swaminathan said that WHO recommends immunizing people at risk first, including the elderly and those with underlying conditions like diabetes or respiratory disease, as well as key workers.

But Swaminathan noted that there was still no strategy regarding any possible global distribution of COVID-19 vaccines. "WHO will propose these solutions," she said. "Countries need to agree and come to a consensus. That's the only way this can work."

Numerous developed countries including Britain, France, the Netherlands, Germany and the US have already struck deals with pharmaceuticals to secure vaccine supplies for their citizens first.

WHO and partners have called for drugmakers to suspend their patent rights on any effective COVID-19 vaccine and for billions of dollars to buy vaccines for developing countries.

Advance orders

As the race intensified for a vaccine against the new coronavirus, rich countries are rushing to place advance orders for the inevitably limited supply to guarantee their citizens get immunized first - leaving significant questions about whether developing countries will get any vaccines in time to save lives before the pandemic ends.

Earlier this month, the United Nations, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent, and others said it was a "moral imperative" that everyone have access to a "people's vaccine." But such grand declarations are unenforceable, and without a detailed strategy, the allocation of vaccines could be inequitable and extremely messy, said health experts.

"We have this beautiful picture of everyone getting the vaccine, but there is no road map on how to do it," said Yuan Qiong Hu, a senior legal and policy adviser at Doctors Without Borders in Geneva. Few measures have been taken to resolve numerous problems for achieve fair distribution, she said.

In the past, Hu said, companies have often applied for patents for nearly every step of a vaccine's development and production: from the biological material like cell lines used, to the preservative needed to stretch vaccine doses and even how the shots are administered.

"We can't afford to face these multiple layers of private rights to create a 'people's vaccine,'" she said, urging "very open conditions" so every manufacturer capable of doing so can produce a vaccine once it's proven effective.

Opinion

O Mohammed VI, you will always be the King of Hearts

By Ahmed Al-Jarallah

Editor-in-Chief, the Arab Times

MOROCCAN King Mohammed VI deserves the "King of Hearts" title because of his standing among the Moroccans who see in him a renewed renaissance and a maker of hope through his moral doses and continuous activity in following up the affairs of the country as well as for making Morocco the golden gate to the African continent.

Hence, when he underwent heart surgery, his fellow Moroccans supplicated and prayed to Almighty Allah to render the surgery successful, and to grant their king a speedy recovery.

King Mohammed VI would not have acquired such love if he had not worked throughout the past years to advance his country's affairs, devote all his activities to its development in the urban and humanitarian fields, and solve several dilemmas that the country experienced for decades.

In the educational field, the state worked throughout the last two decades to reduce illiteracy by a large percentage. By building more educational facilities in various regions, it is currently seeking to render illiteracy at the lowest levels. This is due to the prevailing conviction of the Moroccan king that the renaissance of nations lies in human development which can build the economy and the infrastructure that highlights its role in crises.

This is what happened during the COVID-19 crisis, as Morocco proved to be a pioneer in combating the spread of the virus locally. Only six thousand cases were reported out of the population of about 40 million people, and more than half had recovered, while very few deaths were recorded.

The country did not accept any foreign aid, because it was self-sufficient.

In fact, it rushed to send medical aid to 15 African countries and some European countries.

There is no doubt that this can be interpreted from the volume of congratulations and well-wishes received at the royal palace from all over the world for the success of the surgery.

It is also an affirmation of the Moroccan role in foreign policy, which is based on establishment of stability in a continent that has long suffered from political challenges and military conflicts.

The geographical location of Morocco makes it a link between Africa, Europe and the Arab world, and requires it to play a unifying role, bridging gaps in viewpoints, and initiating to strengthen relations among different civilizations.

Therefore, the several initiatives of the young monarch are aimed at spreading a culture of peace and coexistence among religions and civilizations, given that peace is an essential pillar of life in this world, and protection of freedom of beliefs and right to practice religious rites is the main pillar of this building.

As an expression of these pillars, Morocco is a land of tolerance, openness and coexistence among different religions, races and civilizations.

There is no doubt that this successful surgical operation came as a new occasion for Moroccans to renew the pledge of allegiance to their king, entailing to continue working for further development, progress and prosperity.

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MPs approve seven bills

By Saeed Mahmoud Saleh
Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, June 18: The National Assembly session on Wednesday witnessed the approval of seven bills.

The first bill is on amending Penal and Procedures Law No. 17/1960 to give a chance to those convicted through a final verdict to request for retrial in case new pieces of evidence are found to support their acquittal. A total of 50 MPs and ministers voted in favor of the bill while one MP abstained.

The bill, which was approved in the first round of discussion on Feb 19, will be enforced retroactively to include those convicted prior to its ratification.

The second bill is on amending Civil and Commercial Trials Law No. 38/1980 to allow a convict to sue the judge in case the latter committed grave mistake such as imposing penalty that does not match the crime or if the convict is proven innocent.

According to the bill, the convict must put KD 200 guarantee which will be put into the treasury of the Justice Ministry and this amount will be returned only if proven that the judge is wrong.

Legal and Legislative Affairs Committee Chairman MP Khalid Al-Shatti said the bill is aimed at improving judiciary proceedings, adding that the relevant report was approved by the Supreme Judiciary Council.

In defense of the bill, MP Al-Humaidi Al-Subai'e argued an individual can be sent to jail for two years; during which he loses his job and his family suffers for long a time, then he is found innocent by the Court of Cassation. He asked: "Who will compensate the innocent individual for the damages he suffered and who bears responsibility for such a mistake?"

Minister of Justice Fahd Al-Afasi affirmed his support for the bill, which was approved by the Assembly and then referred to the government.

The third bill is on granting license to private law offices to provide the related services for registering and documenting contracts. It was approved in the first round of discussion on Feb 19 and the second round on Wednesday when 53 MPs and ministers unanimously voted in its favor.

The fourth bill is on amending the law on the establishment of the Public Institution for Social Security (PIFSS) in order to allow retirees to obtain salary advance and pay it in installment.

MPs Adel Al-Damkhi, Muhammad Haif, Osama Al-Shaheen and others recommended adding an article to establish a special department at PIFSS to process the salary advance for retirees according to the Islamic Sharia.

However, the Assembly decided to vote on the bill as it is and the suggested additional article will be submitted later as a separate bill in order to save time and to avoid disrupting the

ratification of this bill which a large number of retirees are waiting for. A total of 49 MPs and ministers voted in favor of the bill, one voted against and four abstained.

The fifth bill is on amending Social Security Law No. 61/1976 to grant loans to retirees which be paid in monthly installment of about 15 percent of the pension. The existing law stipulates 25 percent of the pension as monthly installment.

In response to the query of MP Abdullah Al-Romi about the cost of implementing the bill, Minister of Finance Barrak Al-Shitan disclosed that the estimated cost is KD 130 million if all the retirees obtain a loan at once.

A total of 53 MPs and ministers voted in favor of the bill, one voted against and one abstained.

The sixth bill is on suspending the collection of payments for loans that citizens obtained from the Family Fund and Insolvency Fund for six months. The bill was approved in the first deliberation.

The Assembly Decree stipulates that the second deliberation must be done four days later, unless the Assembly thinks otherwise.

Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanim asked the MPs to vote on conducting the second deliberation in the same session. The second deliberation resulted in approval of the bill as 51 MPs and ministers unanimously voted in its favor.

The seventh bill is on the electronic notification for parties in a judiciary dispute. It is aimed at avoiding common mistakes in using traditional mail for many reasons like change in address or when the address is not clear. The bill was approved in the first deliberation on Feb 19.

Legal and Legislative Affairs Committee Chairman MP Khalid Al-Shatti confirmed that the Supreme Judiciary Council and Ministry of Justice approved the bill, adding that the latter has one comment.

Minister of Justice Fahad Al-Afasi said Law No. 26/2015 organizes the electronic notification in the first phase - public institutions, second phase - commercial companies, and the third phase - individuals who constitute about 70 percent of parties in lawsuits.

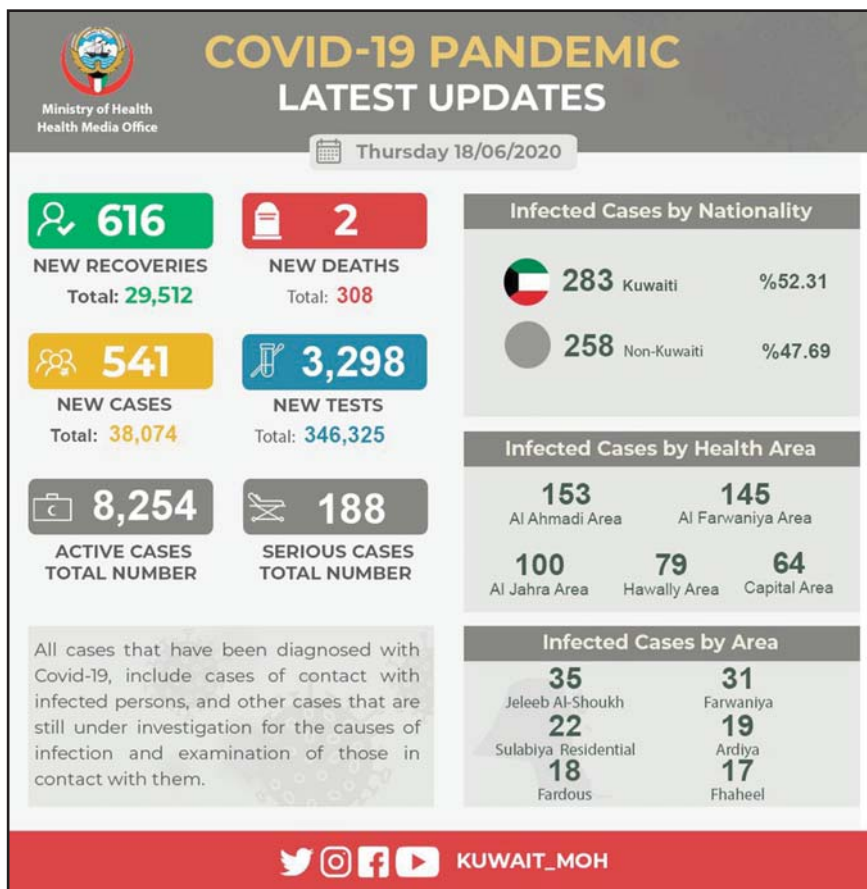
After the session, Al-Ghanim said Minister of Health Dr Bassel Al-Sabah informed him that one of the MPs who attended the session on Tuesday is suspected of being infected with coronavirus, but the said MP was absent during Wednesday's session.

He affirmed the Assembly building will be sterilized and he asked everyone to stop coming to the building during the period of sterilization which is expected to last for some days.

He added that he authorized the Assembly Office to specify the timings of the sessions according to the recent developments and in coordination with HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Sabah.



In this June 12, 2020 file photo, a health worker draws blood for COVID-19 antibody testing in Dearborn, Michigan. A genetic analysis of COVID-19 patients published on June 17, in the New England Journal of Medicine suggests a person's blood type may have some influence on whether they develop severe disease. (AP)



ECMO tech saves child

Kidney caused most COVID deaths

KUWAIT CITY, June 18, (Agencies): A joint study of scientists and specialists from the Ministry of Health, the Dasman Diabetes Institute and Kuwait University has shown that 65 percent of people died in the intensive care unit due to kidney complications, high levels of urea, and rapid deterioration of kidney function, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

The study, which was conducted on 417 patients at the Jaber Al-Ahmad Hospital between Feb 24 to May 24, showed that 39.3 percent of coronavirus (COVID-19) cases in Kuwait were asymptomatic, highlighting the potential role of renal markers in predicting the outcome of intensive care.

The study, which was presented by Assistant Professor of Genomics at Kuwait University, Dasman Diabetes Institute and member of the Board of Directors of the Scientific Center Hamad Yassin on his page on the social networking site "Twitter", stated that in early December 2019, the first groups of coronavirus 2019 were identified in Wuhan, China, attributed to a new coronavirus, now known as severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV2); Kuwait reported its first cases of COVID-19 on Feb 24, 2020 and since then the number of cases has been increasing rapidly.

The study indicated that 62.8 percent of the 417 patients included in the study were male, they were divided into four groups, the first without symptoms and 39.3 percent, the second was mild symptoms and 41 percent, and the third was entered into the intensive care unit and recovered and represented 5.3 percent. And the fourth and last group, 14.4 percent of them died in the intensive care unit.

The source explained that the average age of patients in the intensive care unit ranges from 53 to 61 years, and all of them suffer from chronic diseases, with 40 percent of them suffering from diabetes, 46.7 percent of high blood pressure, 20.3 percent of asthma and 21.7 percent of cardiovascular disease.

She also indicated that the analysis of blood

biochemistry in the fourth group "Intensive Care Mortality" showed that they had a distinct abnormal pattern for certain signs when entering the intensive care unit, as 65 percent of deaths in intensive care had kidney complications and elevated levels of urea where the kidney function deteriorates rapidly.

ECMO technology

Al-Adan Hospital announced, on Thursday, that it had successfully utilized Extra-Corporeal Membrane Oxygenation (ECMO) in the treatment of children affected by the coronavirus.

Head of Al-Ahmedi medical district Dr Ahmad Al-Shatti affirmed to KUNA that treatment for COVID-19 using ECMO technology was rare.

The staff at Al-Adan hospital managed to succeed in utilizing ECMO under the supervision and support of the Ministry of Health, he added.

In regard to the case, Dr Al-Shatti indicated that an eight-year-old girl - suffering from acute lung infection - received treatment using ECMO for about two weeks.

The girl survived her ordeal and was shifted back to the ICU dedicated to children, he said, mentioning that there will be discussions on expanding the use of ECMO to include more cases.

541 new cases

Kuwait Health Ministry, on Thursday, reported 541 new coronavirus infections, bringing the tally to 38,074, while deaths totaled 308 after recording two new fatalities over past 24 hours.

During the daily press briefing, the ministry's spokesperson Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad said the new cases were of people who were in close contact to patients suffering from infection with the virus.

The new cases included 283 Kuwaiti nationals and 258 people of various nationalities.