Communicating radiation risks in paediatric imaging

Advancing imaging technology has opened new horizons for clinical diagnostics and has greatly improved patient care. As a result, the use of medical imaging has increased rapidly worldwide during recent decades and the spectrum of its applications in paediatric health care has expanded. However, inappropriate use may result in unnecessary and preventable radiation risks, particularly in children. In response to this, WHO established a global collaboration to implement a project on radiation risk communication for health-care providers in paediatric imaging. The document that has been developed serves as a communication tool about known or potential radiation risks associated with paediatric imaging procedures, to support risk-benefit dialogue during the process of paediatric health-care delivery. It provides information and resources to support communication strategies, including examples of key messages to use in different scenarios. The tool is primarily intended for health-care providers who refer children for imaging procedures involving ionizing radiation exposure. Click here to access the report, an executive summary in all languages and a feature story.

Building Healthier Societies through implementation of the Paris Agreement

The Paris Agreement, adopted at the 21st Conference of the Parties (COP21) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change stipulates that “the right to health” will be central to the actions taken in the global response to climate change. To build on this historic opportunity, WHO and the Government of France will jointly host a Second Global Conference on Health and Climate: “Building Healthier Societies through implementation of the Paris Agreement”. The Conference will demonstrate how the public health community will support implementation of the Paris Agreement, in order to build healthier and more sustainable societies. The Conference will be held on 7–8 July 2016 in Paris, France.

The Paris Agreement, adopted on 12 December 2015, marks the beginning of a new era in the global response to climate change. The world now has a global climate agreement that will have a major public health policy impact as countries take action. Click here for more information.

Working further on climate and health, WHO has collaborated with the International Federation of Medical Students Associations (IFMSA) and the United Nations Alliance on Climate Change Education, Training and Public Awareness to develop a training manual Climate and Health: Enabling Students and Young Professionals to Understand and Act Upon Climate Change Using a Health Narrative.

Global Innov8 training and orientation

WHO is in the process of finalizing an Innov8 Approach for Reviewing National Health Programmes to strengthen action on equity, gender, human rights and social determinants of health. A technical handbook and a training manual on the Innov8 approach will be launched in mid-2016. Planning is now underway regarding Innov8 adaptation to, and rollout in, different regional and country contexts. To this end, a Global Innov8 training and orientation meeting was held aimed at familiarizing participants with the technical resources and strategies available for adapting and applying the approach in different regional and national initiatives in 2016–2017. Meeting outcomes will also contribute to WHO’s strategic thinking on how best to advance the global rollout of Innov8 and to establish a community of practice linked to this body of work. The meeting was held from 18 to 20 April 2016 in Manila, Philippines. Follow up to the meeting will focus on advancing and operationalizing rollout and implementation plans. Click here for more information.
Cycling Festival Europe

Urban air pollution, physical inactivity and road traffic injuries annually kill 3.7 million, 3.2 million, and 1.3 million people, respectively. Transport contributes to approximately 25% of urban air pollution and 14% of global greenhouse gas emissions. Cycling and walking not only contribute to reducing environmental pollution, but also to decreasing the burden of heart disease, cancer and mental health.

Aiming to raise awareness about this issue, the Netherlands – a cycling nation with more bicycles (22.5 million) than people (17 million) - offered to host a Cycling Festival to Europe from 14 April to 30 June 2016, to support a growing cycling culture in European cities and countries. With this in mind, the Permanent Mission of the Kingdom of the Netherlands organized a cycling event around Geneva together with UN organizations and cycling-related associations on 14 April 2016. WHO is taking part in ‘Bike to Work’ for the third year and this time, for two full months: May and June 2016. Bike to Work is an annual nationwide campaign to promote biking across Switzerland.

Public Space: An Invaluable Resource to Deliver Sustainable Urban Health

“Smart design and investment in sustainable public spaces can help increase levels of physical activity, reduce traffic injuries, urban violence and urban air pollution including greenhouse gas emissions, both protecting public health and mitigating climate change”. This summarizes the key conclusions of a WHO side event at a Habitat III Thematic Meeting on Public Spaces. The event provided an opportunity to discuss links between public space, public health and climate change and to identify good practice for, and barriers to, improving public spaces, focussing on case studies featuring recreational public spaces, walking and cycling, and access to local public markets. Participants agreed that “health can be a driver of cost-effective urban planning strategies and related transport mitigation strategies” and that this should be reflected in the New Urban Agenda to be adopted by UN Member States during Habitat III, the Third United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development, which will be held this October in Quito, Ecuador. The Habitat III Thematic Meeting took place from 4 to 5 April 2016 in Barcelona, Spain.

Chernobyl accident: 30 years of recovery and research

On 26 April 2016, the world marked the 30th anniversary of Chernobyl – the most serious accident ever to occur in the nuclear power industry. The accident contaminated large areas of Belarus, the Russian Federation and Ukraine with radioactive materials; radionuclides were measurable in all countries of the northern hemisphere. This directly impacted on more than 300,000 lives and caused significant economic losses in the entire region.

The WHO Radiation programme (RAD) works with national research centres, the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC), and the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation (UNSCEAR) to assess the risks and to support the development of public health policies for Chernobyl-affected territories. A post-2016 Chernobyl strategy was announced on 26 April 2016 at a special session of the United Nations General Assembly. To commemorate the 30th anniversary, an international conference. Health effects of the Chernobyl accident – a thirty years aftermath, was held on 18-19 April 2016 in Kiev, Ukraine, with the participation of WHO. For more information please click here.

Facts and Figures

Ionizing radiation, health effects and protective measures

- Ionizing radiation is a type of energy released by atoms in the form of electromagnetic waves or particles.
- People are exposed to natural sources of ionizing radiation, such as in soil, water, vegetation, and to human-made sources, such as x-rays and medical devices.
- Ionizing radiation has many beneficial applications, including uses in medicine, industry, agriculture and research. Today, the most common human-made sources of ionizing radiation are medical devices, including X-ray machines.
- As the use of ionizing radiation increases, so does the potential for health hazards if not properly employed or contained.
- Acute health effects such as skin burns or acute radiation syndrome can occur when doses of radiation exceed certain levels.
- Low doses of ionizing radiation increase the risk of longer-term effects such as cancer.

For more information, please click here.