



Family Living

UNICEF releases new report on children

Threat of AIDS, war and illiteracy may reverse recent gains

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The eradication of small pox. Basic education. Freedom from labor. The last century has brought dramatic improvement to children's lives worldwide, a new UNICEF report shows, but the threat of AIDS, war and illiteracy may reverse these gains for children of the 21st century. In a report released Monday, UNICEF noted the many ways children's lives have been improved in the last 100 years. Widespread iodine supplements have eliminated a major cause of mental retardation. Most children receive basic education. Millions of children have been freed from labor. And in a critical indicator of children's well-being, the mortality rate for children under 4 is declining in developing nations as a whole. But wars, poverty and the spread of AIDS are major obstacles to these

advancements, UNICEF executive director Carol Bellamy said in an interview Sunday. "The impact of HIV-AIDS and of conflict is in some places now not just slowing the gains but also has the potential for reversing the gains," Bellamy said. Every minute, five young people are infected with HIV, the virus that causes AIDS. Eleven million people ages 15 to 24 suffer from AIDS. Conflicts, meanwhile, have spread to encompass 56 countries where UNICEF works, making it difficult and sometimes impossible to deliver the fruits of 20th century science: vaccines and immunizations. Approximately 540 million children - one in four - live in dangerous situation, the report noted. "For all the difficulties, children go into the 21st century better than they came into the 20th century," Bellamy said. "That's not good enough. I think when 11 million-plus children still die around the world every year from totally, totally, totally preventable causes, then it's not good enough to say, 'Gee things are better off than before.'" The UNICEF report appeals for leadership on the national, community

and family level in AIDS education and in preventing conflicts. "The failure of leadership is reflected in the increased amount of conflict," Bellamy said. "The failure of leadership is reflected in the growth of the HIV-AIDS pandemic and the unwillingness to recognize it as something that really does require a broad commitment from a governmental perspective and a community perspective." One graphic example of how AIDS and conflict hinder aid is the trouble UNICEF and the World Health Organization have in eradicating polio and Guinea worm. Both are prevalent especially in Africa. Aid workers have difficulties reaching children with vaccines in such strife-torn nations as Angola, Sierra Leone and Somalia - not only because of fighting, but also because in some places AIDS has claimed the primary caregiver who would bring a child to be vaccinated. "It turns out the major obstacles now to eradicating polio are not, 'Do we have a vaccine or do we have enough

money,' ... the biggest single problem is access," Bellamy noted. In order to vaccinate children in Afghanistan or Sudan or the Democratic Republic of Congo against diseases eradicated elsewhere, Bellamy said UNICEF and other nongovernmental organizations must negotiate so-called "days of tranquility." The state of the world's children in 1999 contrasts starkly with a decade ago, when the 1990 World Summit for Children set out such goals as eradicating polio and reducing mortality rates for children under five. In many places, goals that then seemed plausible have been overwhelmed by the realities of the post-Cold War era, which has brought greater instability and disparities between rich and poor, Bellamy noted. But also surprising to Bellamy was "the enormous contrast between a 20th century that has seen such technological, medical and scientific advances and a 21st century that we still enter with a sixth of the world's population virtually illiterate."

More households qualify for help with heating bills

CONTRIBUTED STORY FOR THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

More households in Multnomah County will qualify for financial aid to help pay heating bills this winter, thanks to an increase in the program's income guidelines. The effect is a real expansion of the number of Multnomah County households that are eligible for the Low Income Energy Assistance Program (LIEAP), a federal program managed by Multnomah County's Department of Community and Family Services. LIEAP provides payments for household utility bills. To qualify for energy assistance, applicants must be at or below 60% of median income for Oregon. Examples of the new income guidelines are:

- Monthly income of \$1,197 or less for a household of one
- Monthly income of \$2,255 or less for a household of four
- \$352.50 for each additional household member

"Households need to verify their income and heating expenses for this one-time payment, which averages around \$200," said Frances Spak, of Portland Impact, a local service provider. The program lasts until funds run out, which is typically between March and May. To apply for LIEAP, county residents should contact one of the following community agencies in their neighborhood. In Multnomah County: Downtown Area Salvation Army, 239-1226 North Area St. John's YWCA 721-6762 Northeast Area Albina Ministerial Alliance, 285-0493 Northwest Area Friendly House, 228-4335 East County (east of SE 82nd) Human Solutions, 248-5201 Southwest Area Neighborhood House, 246-1663 Southeast Area Portland Impact, 736-6000

Mattel searches for safer plastics

The toymaker wants to find biodegradable, non-petroleum replacement for phthalates

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Consumer advocates hope other companies will follow Mattel Inc.'s lead after the toymaker announced it would seek an alternative to a plastics chemical that has been linked to liver and kidney damage. Phthalates are used to soften plastics for teething rings and playthings babies and toddlers love to sink their teeth into. Mattel is asking scientists to find a biodegradable, non-petroleum replacement for phthalates, which have been used in Mattel's own Barbie dolls. "Mattel's the largest toy manufacturer. We're very pleased with their announcement and hope other companies will follow," said Jeff Wise, policy director for the National Environmental Trust. Mattel announced its plan Tuesday, a day before the National Environmental Trust released a report on the toxic additives. The report said Mattel and other companies still use phthalates in some

toys even though the federal Consumer Product Safety Council last year recommended they stop until more research is done. "We found it in every soft bath toy that we tested, every squeeze toy that we tested. We think that's a serious problem," Wise said. "The government last year took this seriously enough to make this request. We think the toy industry should take this seriously enough to honor it." The danger posed by phthalates is disputed by scientists. European studies conducted on rats linked the chemicals to liver and kidney ailments. Subsequent studies in the United States have found that the level of exposure required to trigger health problems far exceed the amount children are likely to ingest by sucking or chewing on toys. Toys with the highest concentrations of phthalates as a percentage of total weight, according to the study, were Playskool's Barney's Twinken squeeze toy, 57 percent; Mattel's Pooh Bath Tub Pal, 47 percent; and Mega Bloks' Teletubby squeeze toy, 54 percent. The study acknowledged that most major toymakers, including Mattel, had removed phthalates from teething rings and soft rattles. In seeking alternatives, the toy industry is responding to increasing pressure from activists, toy retailers and the European Commission, the administrative arm of the European Union.

TIPS for a safe holiday party

Planning a holiday party? Whether you are having a party at a bar, hotel, office, or home, a plan for serving alcohol responsibly is a must. Consider the following "Top Ten Holiday TIPS" provided by the TIPS (Training for Intervention Procedures) program. Following a sensible strategy for serving alcohol can prevent intoxication and drunken driving while still ensuring that everyone has a good time.

1. Hire only bartenders who are trained in the responsible service of alcohol.
2. Offer soft drinks, fruit juices, bottled water and coffee so that guests have an alternative to alcohol.
3. Have the servers "card" anyone who looks under 30. No I.D., no alcohol.
4. Remind guests that even if they are not driving, it is against the law to serve a visibly intoxicated person.

5. Hire security or other monitors to observe the event away from the service areas.
6. Close the bar about one hour before the event is finished.
7. Make free transportation available both to and from an event in order to prevent drunk driving.
8. Plan entertainment and other activities so that drinking alcohol is not the focus of an event.
9. Don't serve anyone more than one drink at a time.
10. Ensure that there is food available - eating will help slow down drinking and alcohol absorption into the bloodstream.

In today's world of ever increasing misinformation about Blood Alcohol Content (BAC) and the dangers of drinking, the TIPS mission "to educate and train all facets of society in the responsible sale and consumption of alcohol" has never been more relevant.

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