**Global mercury treaty to be put into force**

By DTI

**BRUSSELS, Belgium:** The European Union, together with seven of its member states, has ratified the Minamata Convention on Mercury and resoundingly provided the clinching votes needed to bring it into force. The international agreement aims to protect both humans and the environment from the negative effects of mercury and mercury compounds, and its ratification is seen as a crucial step in achieving this.

The Minamata Convention was signed in October 2013 under the United Nations Environmental Programme. It was named in honour of the Japanese city of Minamata, where thousands of people were poisoned as a result of dumped wastewater containing methylmercury. Though 128 countries had already signed it, the treaty needed to be ratified by 50 countries to enter into force. With the ratification provided by the EU and seven member states—Bulgaria, Denmark, Hungary, Malta, the Netherlands, Romania and Sweden—the total number of signatories reached 51, resulting in its enactment.

Owing to its ratification, the Minamata Convention will now become legally binding for all involved parties on 16 August 2017. In addition to this, the first Conference of the Parties to the Minamata Convention will be held in Geneva in Switzerland from 24 to 29 September 2017. This conference will be instrumental in deciding how the treaty will be adopted and implemented on a technical, administrative and operational level.

“This legally binding agreement is our best hope to curtail the global mercury crisis,” said Michael Bender, co-coordinator of the Zero Mercury Working Group, an international coalition formed by the European Environmental Bureau. “Over time, it will provide countries with both the technical and financial resources necessary to reduce worldwide exposure risks to mercury.”

The World Health Organization considers mercury to be one of ten chemicals of major public health concern owing to its numerous adverse effects. Mercury and its assorted compounds have been demonstrated to threaten proper development of children in utero. They have also been associated with reduced cognitive performance, kidney damage and digestive system issues. Though dental amalgam’s effect on the level of mercury in the human body is a topic of much debate, there has nevertheless been a shift away from amalgam, which contains roughly 50 per cent mercury, towards alternative filling materials.

**Drug-related oral health problems investigated**

By DT Asia Pacific

**BRISBANE, Australia:** People with substance use disorders are more prone to dental caries and periodontal disease than the general population, as well as less likely to receive regular dental care. Hence, the oral health of these patients is a particular challenge for dentists. A new review study has now aimed to examine drug-associated oral health problems and ways for dental professionals to improve these patients’ oral health.

“Drug use is associated with problems such as xerostomia, an increased urge to snack, clenching and grinding of teeth, and chemical erosion due to applying cocaine to teeth and gingivae,” said Baghaie. In addition, dentists should be aware of issues concerning treatment and consent when the patient is intoxicated and be alert for substance use disorders.

**WORLD NEWS**

**HPV vaccination may lower risk of oral infections that cause mouth cancer**

By DTI

**CHICAGO, USA:** A study conducted in the US has found that the human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine may help reduce oral infections that cause mouth cancer.

Using data from the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey, the study looked at self-reported records of 1,627 young adults, aged 18–33, during the period 2011–2014 and compared those who had received one or more doses of an HPV vaccine with those who had not. Focusing on the prevalence of HPV 16, 18, 6 and 11—the four types covered by HPV vaccines prior to 2016—oral rinse samples collected by mobile health facilities were tested for the virus in Gillison’s lab.

According to the results, the HPV strains investigated were found in far fewer people who had received vaccine shots, demonstrating an 88 per cent lower risk. At the time of data collection, around 18.3 per cent of young adults in the US reported receiving one or more vaccine doses before age 26, with vaccination rates more common in women than men (29.3 vs. 6.9 per cent).

“When we compared the prevalence in vaccinated men to non-vaccinated men, we didn’t detect any infections in vaccinated men. The data suggests that the vaccine may be reducing the prevalence of those infections by as much as 100 per cent,” said Gillison.

According to World Health Organization reports, oral cancer affects 700,000 men each year. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 63 per cent of adolescents and girls and 50 per cent of adolescent boys have started with the HPV vaccine series throughout the US Nationwide, there are an estimated 3,000 new cases of HPV-associated oropharyngeal cancers diagnosed in women and about 13,200 diagnosed in men each year.

Approved in 2006 to prevent cervical cancers in women, and later for other cancers, including anal cancer in men, negative stigma around the HPV vaccine being used only to prevent sexually transmitted infections and not cancer has meant gaining acceptance and awareness has been slow. Actor Michael Douglas raised the issue publicly several years ago, when he blamed his cancer on it.

Oral sex has been regarded as the main risk factor for contracting an HPV infection in the mouth or throat, according to Gillison. She explained, however, that oral sex does not give one cancer. The infection in rare cases can develop into cancer over many years.

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