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Tibet plan calls for control of parasitic worms

By **DAQIONG** in Lhasa and **WANG XIAODONG** in Beijing

A parasitic disease plaguing many parts of the Tibet autonomous region will be controlled by the end of 2020, under a plan released by the regional government.

The disease — echinococcosis — is caused by a type of tiny tapeworm and infects people and animals such as dogs and foxes. It damages major organs such as the liver, lungs and brain and can be fatal.

It is found throughout Tibet, with about 49,900 people infected, accounting for 1.66 percent of the population, the highest rate in China, according to a survey by the National Health and Family Planning Commission.

The incidence is highest among herders, at 3.66 percent, the survey found.

The disease places severe burdens on patients and their families and is a major reason for poverty in Tibet, the regional health commission said.

Under the plan, Tibet's regional government will intensify prevention and control efforts in the next three years, aiming to bring the incidence of the disease below 1 percent in at least 40 counties by 2020.

Efforts include improving health education and hygiene among the public, conducting disease screenings and providing more subsidies for medical treatment so patients' basic medical expenditures can be covered.

Meanwhile, the government will intensify its supervision of dogs — major carriers of the disease in Tibet. It will build shelters for strays and treat infected dogs until they are free of the disease.



A doctor checks a 2-year-old child who was diagnosed with echinococcosis in Nakarze county in the Tibet autonomous region in September. LI XIN / XINHUA



It is urgent to promote knowledge about how to prevent the disease.”

Dong Jiahong, specialist at Beijing Tsinghua Changgung Hospital

Under the plan, the government will also improve public facilities to ensure a clean and safe water supply and promote pollution-free toilets.

Tibet faces many challenges in eliminating the disease, including poor health facilities, unhygienic conditions in most pasture areas and a lack of medical talent, the commission said.

“Prevention is key,” said Dong Jiahong, a specialist in liver and gallbladder diseases at Beijing Tsinghua Changgung Hospital who provided free surgeries to patients in Ganzi, Sichuan province, in July.

“It is urgent to promote knowledge about how to prevent the disease, such as separating humans and livestock and paying more attention to personal hygiene in echinococcosis-epidemic regions,” Dong said, adding that screening work and blood tests are also urgently needed.

Since last year, the hospital said it has received at least five patients, including three from Tibet, with terminal liver disease related to echinococcosis, and some have received liver transplants.

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Catching up with culture



Students in Miao ethnic costumes try to catch a silk ball at a cultural event at a middle school in Tongren, Guizhou province, on Monday. More than 2,000 students took part in the event. The city has added ethnic culture to its school curriculum. LONG YUANBIN / FOR CHINA DAILY

HEALTH

Gay men find HIV drug in Thailand, not China

Medicine can cut risk by 90 percent, but it's not approved for prevention

By **SHAN JUAN** shanjuan@chinadaily.com.cn

Thailand has been a hot destination for Chinese tourists for years. Yet many now are heading to the Southeast Asian country for a new reason — to buy cheap drugs to prevent HIV.

Pre-exposure prophylaxis, commonly known as PrEP, is a type of medicine that, if taken daily, can reduce the risk of HIV infection via sexual intercourse by more than 90 percent, according to health studies.

Several countries recommend the drugs as a weapon to prevent the spread of HIV among people in high-risk groups, such as gay men.

However, the China Food and Drug Administration approved PrEP in 2015 for the treatment of HIV/AIDS — not prevention — which means doctors are not allowed to

prescribe it to patients unless they test positive for the virus.

Xiao Dong, who runs Tongzhi, an NGO based in Beijing that is committed to combating AIDS, said he began traveling to Thailand early last year, for vacations and to stock up on anti-HIV medicine.

As an openly gay man, he said health and safety are his top priorities: “I use both condoms and PrEP to guard against HIV,” he said. Advocates say prevention is worthwhile, given that the prevalence of HIV among Chinese gay men averages more than 5 percent in most cities and can exceed 10 percent in major metropolises, according to the National Center for AIDS and Sexually Transmitted Disease Control.

Given increasing awareness, more gay men in China have followed suit. Xiao said

he knows nearly 100 men from Beijing who have also traveled to Thailand to purchase PrEP.

“It's a positive sign that our community has become more responsible for our own health, and each other's. They are willing to pay out of pocket,” he said.

Thailand is easy to visit, as Chinese citizens do not require a visa, and the country is recognized for its friendliness toward the LGBT community.

It also offers easy, affordable access to PrEP, Xiao said, who added that generic products can cost 300 yuan (\$44) for a one-month supply, while brand-name products are about 800 yuan for the same amount.

By contrast, the brand-name drugs sell for nearly 2,000 yuan in China, said Wu Hao, director of the infectious diseases department at Beijing's You'an Hospital.

You'an treats most of the AIDS patients in Beijing. Last year, he said, more than 90 percent of the newly detected

HIV sufferers in the capital were gay men.

According to Wu, who specializes in sexually transmitted diseases, the efficacy of PrEP has been widely recognized internationally. It has been included in the HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment guidelines of the World Health Organization and health authorities in the United States.

However, Wu said, China has not yet introduced PrEP in its national guidelines. In addition, he ruled out the possibility that the government would give the drugs free to willing subjects, largely because of the high costs involved.

Wu's department will launch a yearlong PrEP research study this summer with the center, recruiting 600 to 1,000 gay men and giving them free PrEP drugs.

“I welcome PrEP as prevention for those who are at high risk of infection, given that condom use is low, particularly among gay men in China,” he said.

More patients sign with family doctors

By **WANG XIAODONG** wangxiaodong@chinadaily.com.cn

More than a third of Beijing's permanent residents were covered by family doctor services as of the end of last year, according to the Municipal Health and Family Planning Commission.

The overall health of Beijing's population has improved greatly since 2009, when China launched a series of programs to promote the equalization of basic public health services nationwide, said Liu Zejun, a member of the Beijing commission who is in charge of disease prevention and control, at a news conference on Monday.

Last year, average life expectancy in Beijing increased to more than 82 years, up from 80.4 in 2009, while the infant mortality rate decreased to 2.21 per thousand last year, from 3.49

per thousand in 2009 — a level similar to that of developed countries, he said.

By the end of last year, 3.84 million households in Beijing, or 7.7 million residents, had signed up for family doctor services at community health centers, accounting for more than 35 percent of the city's permanent population, Liu said.

China carried out a series of public health programs in 2009 to cope with increasing health challenges, such as heavier burdens caused by noninfectious chronic diseases and an aging population, said Gao Guangming, deputy chief for community health affairs at the National Health and Family Planning Commission.

The services, offered free by grassroots health institutions, include establishing electronic health records and providing vaccinations for infants, as well as prenatal health checkups, he said.

7.7 million

residents in Beijing had signed up for family doctor services at community health centers as of 2016.

More than 76 percent of people in China had health records by the end of 2015, he said. More than 88 million patients with hypertension were under management by grassroots health providers by the end of 2015, two and a half times that in 2010, Gao said.

In recent years, new services, such as those offered by family doctors, have become part of basic public health services in places such as Beijing and Tianjin, according to the national health authority.

Chang Yi, director of the health center in the Nanmofang community in Beijing's Chaoyang district, said 56,000 people in the community, nearly half of all residents, have signed up with family doctors since 2010.

“All the residents must have their health records established at the community health center before signing with family doctors,” Chang said. “They can enjoy free services including health checkups, chronic disease management and referrals to top-grade hospitals by their doctors when necessary.”

Lu Jijun, a general practitioner at the health center in Tianjin's Youyilu community, said more than 3,000 people there have signed up for family doctor services since June 1.

The fee is 120 yuan (\$17.60) a year, but after government subsidies, it comes to less than 20 yuan, she said.

Homeless reconnect via facial technology

By **CHINA DAILY**

Homeless shelters in Shanghai are using facial recognition software and new media to help reunite vagrants, beggars and lost seniors with their families.

Last week, police took Wang Yongquan, 92, to a center in Huangpu district because he appeared confused and was unable to remember his address. It took workers at the shelter just 20 minutes to identify him using a facial recognition system and contact his relatives, who lived nearby.

“We used to have to search for personal information in a handwritten book and check printed photos for matches,” said Kang Qingping, a shelter worker. “Now, it's more efficient. We send 95 percent of the people home, compared with about 80 percent before.”

The system was installed in mid-2015 and includes images of anyone who has sought help at the center within the past five years. Wang, who had visited four times before, was one of five people it identified this year.

“We have around 24,000 people stored in our facial recognition system,” Kang said. “After uploading a photo, the system will pop up the top five matches by similarity and also include the person's information, fingerprints, history and family contacts.”



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Kang Qingping, shelter worker in Shanghai

The Shanghai Civil Affairs Bureau runs 16 shelters across the city. Together they helped more than 20,000 people return home last year. The Huangpu shelter accounted for about half. About 6 percent were seniors and the rest were juveniles and migrant workers.

Shelters are also using the internet more, through social media and websites.

In April, Xinhua News Agency reported that the Huangpu shelter had helped a man reconnect with his family after two decades. The 72-year-old, surnamed Liang, was brought in by police and could only remember that his hometown was Taizhou, a city in Zhejiang province.

Social workers got in touch with news website Toutiao, which sent a notification to registered users in Taizhou. That led to his daughter getting in touch. After a DNA test proved positive, he was accompanied home on the train.

Liang's mother, who is 95, had said she thought she would never see her son again.

Kang, the shelter worker, said that such people are usually helped in a traditional way — listening to their accent, searching personal belongings, asking questions and cooperating with public security officers.

Before being identified, people can stay in the shelter. About 37 vagrants are there now. Among them, several are from other countries.

He Qi in Shanghai contributed to this story.

Briefly

TIANJIN Official demoted for violations



Wang Hong-jiang, a former member of the Standing Committee of the Tianjin Municipal Committee of the Communist Party of China, has been demoted for serious disciplinary violations, the CPC disciplinary watchdog announced on Monday. Wang was also the former head of the United Front Work Department of the Municipal Committee, according to the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection. He misused funds and concealed his failings during inquiries, the commission said.

XINHUA

ZHEJIANG

Ship returns after sulfide research

Science ship *Xiangyanghong 10* returned to China on Sunday after a voyage of more than 200 days to the southwest Indian Ocean. The ship docked at Zhoushan. The mission was to explore polymetallic sulfide in 30,000 square meters of seabed, under a contract between China and the International Seabed Authority, said Li Huaiming, a scientist involved in the project. Scientists used the Chinese unmanned submersible *Qianlong 2* to conduct eight dives, reaching a maximum depth of 3,320 meters.