News

HIV testing recommended for all pregnant women. The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force, a panel of independent, private-sector healthcare experts supported by the Department of Health and Human Services, has joined the CDC and the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists in recommending that voluntary HIV testing be offered to all pregnant women, not just those considered to be at high risk. The panel cited evidence that early detection of HIV in pregnant women and subsequent treatment reduces the risk of the virus being passed from mother to child. Transmission prevention options include taking HIV-suppressive medications during pregnancy, delivering by Cesarean section, and bottle-feeding instead of breast-feeding infants. When preventive measures are taken, the risk of mother-to-child transmission is reduced from as much as 25% to as little as 1%.

Infectious disease

Nipah virus clue. Two separate teams of U.S. scientists — one from the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences in Bethesda, MD, and another from the University of California-Los Angeles (UCLA) and the University of Pennsylvania (Penn) — recently reported that they have identified the mechanism by which Nipah virus infects cells. The virus, which is carried by fruit bats and is spread to humans either directly or through intermediary livestock, is one of the more lethal emerging infectious diseases (see “The nature of zoonotic diseases: ecology, prediction, and prevention,” MLO, July 2006, p. 10). Both research teams found that the virus infects cells by attaching to the Ephrin-B2 protein, a cell receptor found in the brain and in the lining of blood vessels. According to Dr. Benhur Lee, the lead researcher of the UCLA/Penn study, this knowledge should lead to the development of therapeutic drugs to treat the virus and to a vaccine to prevent infection.

Nipah virus, which is now considered a potential bioterrorism agent, first appeared in humans and pigs in Malaysia in 1998. That first outbreak caused the deaths of 100 people — 40% of those infected — and the culling of 1 million pigs. In a series of outbreaks in Bangladesh since 2001, the human death rate has increased to 70%, seeming to indicate that the virus is mutating into a more lethal form.

Education

Reimbursement workshop. The CLMA (Clinical Laboratory Management Association) will host its annual regulatory and compliance workshop, Reimbursement Education and Learning (REAL) 2005, Sept. 8-10 at the Hyatt Regency New Orleans. The course will provide the most up-to-date information available to guide participants on proper billing and claims-submission procedures, while ensuring maximum reimbursement. Led by Christopher P. Young and featuring a panel of invited experts, the program will include case studies, on-site coaching, extensive Q&A opportunities, and expert lectures. The workshop agenda and registration information are available at www.clma.org/main.aspx?s=confed&1=detail&c=E5REAL. For more information, contact Scott Kober at 610-995-9580 x245 or skober@clma.org.

Clarification

While the author referred throughout the article “Under the blue top: coags, corrections, and ‘crits’” (MLO, February 2005, p. 20) to Becton, Dickinson and Company, or BD, as “the maker of Vacutainer brand tubes,” BD’s trademark office sent MLO the requirements for referencing its Vacutainer federally and internationally registered trademark. MLO does not use trademark or registration symbols or legends in its copy.