

Health Highlights: Aug. 4, 2009

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- **Human Malaria Originated In Chimps: Study**
- **Swine Flu Won't Automatically Trigger U.S. School Closures: Official**
- **FDA Approves Avastin for Most Common Kidney Cancer**
- **Blocking Protein May Prevent Premature Labor**



Here are some of the latest health and medical news developments, compiled by editors of *HealthDay*:

Human Malaria Originated In Chimps: Study

Chimpanzees appear to be the source of malaria in humans, according to a study released Tuesday.

Researchers studied malaria in chimps in Cameroon and Ivory Coast and concluded that the parasite that causes malaria in humans likely developed from the parasite that causes malaria in chimps, the *Associated Press* reported. It had been believed the two parasites developed from a common origin.

"We now know that malaria, while at least thousands of years old, did not originate in humans but rather was introduced into our species, presumably by the bite of a mosquito that had previously fed on a chimpanzee," said Dr. Nathan D. Wolfe of Stanford University and the Global Viral Forecasting Initiative.

He told the *AP* that learning more about the chimp parasite may lead to

better treatments for malaria in humans, or even a vaccine.

The study appears in the journal *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*. Malaria kills a million people worldwide each year.

Swine Flu Won't Automatically Trigger U.S. School Closures: Official

The U.S. government may take a less aggressive stance on school closings in swine flu outbreaks, officials involved in establishing national swine flu response guidelines told the *Associated Press*.

Earlier this year, the government recommended that schools close down at the first sign of the H1N1 swine flu virus, but that advice was later relaxed.

Under the new guidelines, federal officials may recommend school closures only under "extenuating circumstances," such as cases where there are many children with underlying medical conditions, an official involved in guideline discussions told the *AP*.

The government might also suggest school closures if many students or staff are already sick or absent. Officials are trying to finalize guidelines before the start of the new school year.

FDA Approves Avastin for Most Common Kidney Cancer

The drug Avastin has been approved in the United States for treating patients with metastatic renal cell carcinoma, the most common form of kidney cancer.

The Food and Drug Administration approved Avastin to be used in

combination with the drug interferon-alpha, *Agence France Presse* reported.

A study found that patients treated with a combination of the drugs lived nearly twice as long without disease progression compared to patients treated with only interferon-alpha.

Since the end of 2007, Avastin has been available in Europe as a first-line treatment for advanced kidney cancer, *AFP* reported. Last week, European officials approved the drug for treatment of breast cancer.

Blocking Protein May Prevent Premature Labor

Blocking a key protein may help prevent premature labor, say researchers at Imperial College London in Britain.

They found that when Toll-like receptor 4 (TLR4) detects bacterial infection in pregnant women, it triggers inflammation, which appears to induce premature birth, *BBC News* reported.

But the researchers said they found a way to turn off this reaction.

"We are excited about the findings of this research, as we have now discovered how to block a key pathway which leads to premature birth," lead researcher Professor Philip Bennett told *BBC News*. "Although more research needs to be done, we believe this is a step forward in the development of treatments to prevent premature birth."

Premature labor is the major cause of death and disability among babies.

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