

Editorial

There was no specific theme for this June issue of the Belgian Journal of Paediatrics. So, we have decided to make it a « Special Holiday Edition ». We have used the characters of the Belgian comic strip to illustrate it with humor and derision because, yes, holidays are a serious business!

Holidays are a parenthesis that allows us all to change our rhythm, to do other activities, to travel and to discover other horizons, to spend time together... in few words... to recharge our batteries!

But a quick search on pubmed made us realize that vacations also need the attention of the medical community and particularly of the pediatric world. By typing the keywords "children" and "vacation" into the pubmed search engine, we obtained 243 references that deal with positive or negative aspects of this time of the year.

As illustrated by our cartoonist Serge Ernst, intense or prolonged sun exposure may have many effects. To prevent adverse events such as sunburns and long-term risk of skin cancer, protection with sunscreen is necessary. In paediatrics, this is widely relayed to families. However, this raises the question of vitamin D status and risk of deficiency. A recent consensus paper published in the British Journal of Dermatology concludes that the judicious use of daily broad-spectrum sunscreens with high ultraviolet (UV) A protection will not compromise vitamin D status in healthy people. However, photo-protection strategies for patients with photosensitivity disorders that include high sun-protection factor sunscreens with high UVA protection, along with protective clothing and shade-seeking behaviour are likely to compromise vitamin D status. Therefore, sunscreens remain highly recommended to prevent sunburn and screening for vitamin D status and supplementation are recommended in patients with photosensitivity disorders (1).

Outdoor activities and travel are also associated with an increased risk of insect bites, infections with unusual germs or parasites and trauma. Several studies in trauma centers of various European and North American countries register a peak of paediatric fractures in spring and summer. This corresponds to an increase in physical activity. However, some analyses reveal a lower incidence in July corresponding to a low level of sport activities during the summer vacations. This decrease could also be attributed to families going on vacation in the countryside or travelling abroad (2). Surprisingly, several papers show that children's physical activity decreases during school vacations. Less structured days and reduced participation in organized activities may explain part of this decrease (3). Similarly, emerging evidence suggests that children become fatter and less fit over the summer holidays. A recent Australian study revealed that holidays are characterised by longer sleep and higher TV and videogame time, lower vigorous activity, and lower total daily energy expenditure. Uncompensated by dietary adjustments, these differences result in an accumulation of about 650 g of fat over a six-week holiday period (4).

Studies of mental health and cognitive development have shown that time away from school may also be at risk for regression, particularly in social settings where school stimulation is not replaced by adequate supervision (5). This trend was unfortunately observed by many during the COVID 19 pandemic containment measures. Holidays have also an effect on treatment adherence. For instance, Leggett and co reported that medication adherence was reduced during school holidays and on weekends in children with type 1 diabetes (6).

The message of this editorial is certainly not to minimize the need and the benefits of vacations for children, adults, and family life. The points we put forward emphasize the importance of prevention campaigns about vacations. It is useful to accompany our patients and their parents in these changes of rhythm and environment of life. Vacations show the fundamental role of school and teachers. Holidays are an awareness of the responsibilities of parents and grandparents. They underline the place of the family unit in the sustainable development of our children and our societies.

This holiday edition is also the opportunity to highlight the work of our colleagues during these last months. We publish 2 research articles about pulse oximetry to screen for critical congenital cardiopathy in neonates (by Ria Cornelissen and Karel Allegaert) and postnatal cytomegalovirus infection in extremely preterm infants receiving raw milk (by Helene Dumonceau, Anne-Britt Johansson, and Aline Vukovic). The Made in Belgium sections summarize the Ph.D. thesis of Lloyd Tack from UZ Ghent about long-term outcomes of hypospadias with a particular focus on urological and psycho-social function and endocrine reproductive capacity. Several case reports are also published in the fields of paediatric endocrinology, infectiology and neonatology and neurology. We finish this issue on an original touch with the Cochrane Corner reviewing the interest of therapy for autistic people.

On behalf of the editorial board, we wish you a fruitful reading and resourcing summer holidays.

Christophe Chantrain and Marc Raes

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VOOR KINDERGENEESKUNDE
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