

## World's tallest tower closed a month after opening

**DUBAI, United Arab (AP)** — The world's tallest skyscraper has unexpectedly closed to the public a month after its lavish opening, disappointing tourists headed for the observation deck and casting doubt over plans to welcome its first permanent occupants in the coming weeks.

Electrical problems are at least partly to blame for the closure of the Burj Khalifa's viewing platform — the only part of the half-mile high tower open yet. But a lack of information from the spire's owner left it unclear whether the rest of the largely empty building — including dozens of elevators meant to whisk visitors to the tower's more than 160 floors — was affected by the shutdown.

The indefinite closure, which began last week, comes as Dubai struggles to revive its international image as a cutting-edge Arab metropolis amid nagging questions about its financial health.

The Persian Gulf city-state had hoped the 2,717-foot (828-meter) Burj Khalifa would be a major tourist draw. Dubai has promoted itself by wowing visitors with over-the-top attractions such as the Burj, which juts like a silvery needle out of the desert and can be seen from miles around.

In recent weeks, thousands of tourists have lined up for the chance to buy tickets for viewing times often days in advance that cost more than \$27 apiece. Now many of those would-be visitors, such as Wayne Boyes, a tourist from near Manchester, England, must get back in line for refunds.

"It's just very disappointing," said Boyes, 40, who showed up at the Burj's entrance Monday with a ticket for an afternoon time slot only to be told the viewing platform was closed. "The tower was one of my main reasons for coming here," he said.

The precise cause of the \$1.5 billion Dubai skyscraper's temporary shutdown remained unclear.

In a brief statement responding to questions, building owner Emaar Properties blamed the closure on "unexpected high traffic," but then suggested that electrical problems were also at fault.

## Skier survives 17 hours under Swiss avalanche

**EVOLENE, Switzerland (AP)** — A skier was buried beneath an avalanche for 17 hours in the Swiss Alps before being pulled from the snow with only mild hypothermia, police said Sunday.

The 21-year-old man appeared to have survived because he was trapped next to a pocket of air that allowed him to breathe even though he was unable to free himself from the crushing weight of the snow, police in the southern canton of Valais said.

"I've never heard of such a case before," said police spokesman Jean-Marie Bornet. "It's already very difficult to survive more than 45 minutes beneath an avalanche."

The man, who had been skiing alone on an unmarked slope in the Evolene region about 80 kilometers (50 miles) east of Geneva, was reported missing by his family at 4.30 p.m. Saturday, police said.

Rescuers with sniffer dogs found ski tracks leading to where a large avalanche had come down but had to break off their search overnight for safety reasons.

The number of children arriving alone in the West Midlands seeking asylum has risen by almost 700% in six years.

Freedom of Information requests to councils across the West Midlands revealed in 2002 there were 42 children needing care. In 2008 there were 306.

Birmingham City Council said child asylum seekers put strains on its budget, and the government had not provided enough funds.

The government said it had met most funding claims made by the council.

Anne Botting, from specialist foster agency Pathway Care, told the BBC's Inside Out programme there had been an increase in teenage boys arriving from Afghanistan due to the conflict taking place there.

"And it fits in with wherever the conflict is in the world... you see an upsurge in the referrals from that country," she said.

The difficulties in finding care for the children is further compounded by the traumatised state in which they often arrive in the country, she added.

The 2008 figures show Birmingham has 85 child asylum seekers in local authority care. Twenty-two of these are in foster care.

# Child asylum seeker numbers rise in West Midlands



Birmingham city councillor Les Lawrence, cabinet member for children, young people and families, said Birmingham was owed up to £1m in specialists grants by the UK Border Agency.

"We certainly are owed approaching between half and one million pounds and that means we are having to bear within our budgets at the current time," he said.

"And with all the other additional pressures that means we have to find that money through efficiency savings elsewhere."

Nationally, he said he believed local authorities were owed between £15 and £20m in unpaid grants from central government. Gail Adams, UK Border Agency regional director, said she disputed that claim.

"With the exception of a small number of claims, all claims by Birmingham City Council for looking after unaccompanied asylum seeking children have been met in full by the UK Border Agency," she said.

"We recognize that the subject of unaccompanied asylum seeking children is a very complex and emotive issue."

(Source: BBC)

## Steps to follow before getting pregnant

It's not something many couples think about, but preparing your body for pregnancy at least one month ahead of time can improve your odds of conceiving more easily, having a healthier pregnancy, delivering a healthy baby and recovering more easily.

Here are tips from the March of Dimes and other pregnancy health sources to help you make the right choices for preconception nutrition, health and physical fitness:

1. Visit an Ob/Gyn, and request a "preconception" check-up. Your mission is to find out whether you're in good health and physical condition for pregnancy. Your doctor will address any immunizations or medical tests you may need (such as a Pap smear for women), as well as personal and family medical history. Your doctor can also evaluate how much you weigh now and set a target weight gain for pregnancy. Future dads should go in for a general physical (preferably 90 to 120 days before trying to conceive) to be sure they're also in good health.

2. See your dentist for a check-up. Because dental health affects overall health, it makes sense to have a dental exam before pregnancy. Furthermore, researchers have found that periodontal disease can lead to preterm delivery and a higher incidence of low birth-weight babies.

3. Get to a healthy body weight (in a healthy manner). This applies to women who are too thin or too overweight before pregnancy. Check in with your physician about your specific healthy weight.

4. Eat a well-balanced diet that includes a wide variety of healthy foods from all the basic food groups. Be aware that there are some foods you should completely avoid (for example, liver). Keep well-hydrated primarily by drinking water.

5. Stop taking any and all supplements unless approved by your physician. This is particularly important if you're already trying to conceive. Your doctor will likely prescribe a prenatal supplement to begin taking now.

6. Make sure your intake of folic acid, a B vitamin, is optimal to help prevent birth defects. Good sources of folic acid include

a prenatal supplement, enriched breads, pastas, cereals, dried beans/lentils, asparagus, wheat germ, greens and orange juice.

7. If you've been told you have anemia (iron deficiency), it needs to be resolved prior to conception through dietary means and iron supplements prescribed by a doctor.

8. Begin reducing your intake of caffeine. You don't have to eliminate it altogether, but the March of Dimes recommends limiting coffee to no more than one 12-ounce cup a day. Cut back on other sources of caffeine, too, including soft drinks, medications and foods containing caffeine.

9. Stop smoking, and stop taking any illegal drugs (dads, too). All of these can hamper attempts to get pregnant. During pregnancy, a woman who drinks, smokes or takes drugs puts her unborn baby at serious risk of low birth weight and dangerous health complications.

10. Use proper safety precautions around worksite agents, chemicals, lead and other potential hazards (dad, too). Avoid hazardous cleaning supplies, pesticides, chemicals and paint. If your water pipes are old, consider having them tested for lead.

11. Avoid potential infections. Wash your hands regularly with soap and water after using the bathroom, blowing your nose or handling soil. Avoid raw meat, raw fish and unpasteurized milk products. The future mom also should not handle cat litter; let someone else change the box from now on.

12. Establish a reasonable, regular exercise routine. Your level of fitness prior to pregnancy is what will determine how active you can be once pregnant. Just 30 minutes of exercise every day or most days of the week is enough to help maintain or lose weight, improve fitness and reduce stress. Good exercise choices during pregnancy, by the way, include walking, swimming and yoga, according to the March of Dimes.

One final note: Give yourself a lot of credit for being conscientious enough to plan ahead! RELAX and enjoy yourselves during this special time in your lives!

(Source: parenthood.com)

## Loneliness harms health

By Rick Nauert PhD

Feeling a connection to others is a critical component of a person's mental and physical health.

New studies show that a sense of rejection or isolation disrupts not only will power and perseverance, but also key cellular processes deep within the human body.

Chronic loneliness belongs among health risk factors such as smoking, obesity or lack of exercise.

Feeling connected to others is vital to a person's mental well-being, as well as physical health, research at the University of Chicago shows.

The studies, reported in a new book, *Loneliness: Human Nature and the Need for Social Connection*, show that a sense of rejection or isolation disrupts not only abilities, will power and perseverance, but also key cellular processes deep within the human body.

The findings suggest that chronic loneliness belongs among health risk factors such as smoking, obesity or lack of exercise, according to lead author John Cacioppo, the Tiffany & Margaret Blake Distinguished Service Professor in Psychology at the University.

"Loneliness not only alters behavior, but loneliness is related to greater resistance to blood flow through your cardiovascular system," Cacioppo said.

"Loneliness leads to higher rises in morning levels of the stress hormone cortisol, altered gene expression in immune cells, poorer immune function, higher blood pressure and an increased level of depression."

Loneliness also is related to difficulty getting a deep sleep and a faster progression of Alzheimer's disease, said Cacioppo.

One of the founders of a new discipline called social neuroscience, Cacioppo used functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging (fMRI) brain scans and advanced scientific techniques to document the roles of loneliness and social connection as central regulatory mechanisms in human physiology and behavior.

The authors traced the need for connection to its evolutionary roots. In order to survive, humans needed to bond to rear their children. In order to flourish, they needed to extend their altruistic and cooperative impulses beyond narrow self-interest and immediate kin. But in the environment of evolutionary

adaptation, the only real safety was in numbers.

Just as physical pain is a prompt to change behavior (such as moving a finger away from the fire), loneliness evolved as a prompt to action, signaling an ancestral need to repair the social bonds. Feelings of loneliness take a variety of forms, Cacioppo said.

"There are three core dimensions to feeling lonely—intimate isolation, which comes from not having anyone in your life you feel affirms who you are; relational isolation, which comes from not having face-to-face contacts that are rewarding; and collective isolation, which comes from not feeling that you're part of a group or collective beyond individual existence," he said.

It is not solitude or physical isolation itself, but rather the subjective sense of isolation that Cacioppo's work shows to be so profoundly disruptive. Yet, outward circumstances such as moving to a new community or losing an intimate partner can trigger loneliness. And as the authors make clear, today's culture is not always conducive to promoting strong social bonds.

The problem of social isolation will likely grow as conventional societal structures fade. The average household size is decreasing, and by 2010, 31 million Americans—roughly 10 percent of the population—will live alone. Sociologists also have found that people report significantly fewer close friends and confidants than those a generation ago.

Cacioppo and Patrick also demonstrate how loneliness creates a feedback loop that reinforces social anxiety, fear and other negative feelings. By learning more about what underlies this experience, then learning to reframe their response, lonely individuals can reverse the feedback loop, overcome fear and find ways to reconnect.

"We try to offer some help for those who've become stuck," said Patrick. "The process begins in rediscovering those positive, physiological sensations that come during the simplest moments of human contact. But that means overcoming the fear and reaching out."

"Lonely people feel a hunger," Cacioppo added. "The key is to realize that the solution lies not in being fed, but in cooking for and enjoying a meal with others."

(Source: University of Chicago)



## In-laws can claim gifts back after divorce

In-laws in Germany will be able to reclaim gifts made to their children's spouses if the couple's marriage ends in divorce, following a landmark court ruling.

The Federal Court of Justice ruled that a man given around €29,000 (U.S. \$40,000) by his parents-in-law to bid for a house at auction should pay the cash back, after he and their daughter divorced and he got the house.

Judges said that the "contractual basis" of such presents depended on the in-laws' children being able to enjoy the fruits of the gift. This basis no longer applied following a divorce.

The ruling is likely to lead to an increase in demands for sons and daughters-in-law to return gifts after a divorce, the court said.

"If the child benefits from the gift for a long period of time (for example if the couple lives together in a house donated by the in-laws), then only a part of the gift must be paid back," the court said in its ruling.

"If the parents want to avoid this and make sure that only their own child benefits from the gift, then they should offer it only to that child," the court said.

(Source: news.com.au)

## Can blue-colored light prevent suicide?

Glasgow, Scotland, introduced blue street lighting to improve the city's landscape in 2000. Afterward, the number of crimes in areas illuminated in blue noticeably decreased.

The Nara, Japan, prefectural police set up blue street lights in the prefecture in 2005, and found the number of crimes decreased by about 9 percent in blue-illuminated neighborhoods. Many other areas nationwide have followed suit.

Keihin Electric Express Railway Co. changed the color of eight lights on the ends of platforms at Gumyoji Station in Yokohama, Japan, in February.

Since the railway company introduced the new blue lights, they've had no new suicide attempts.

This effect may be attributed to a few possible reasons (some of which are mentioned in the comments section of the article):

The light color is new and unusual, causing people to act more cautiously in the area (as a person is unsure what to expect in the unusually-lit area). Blue is a light color almost universally associated with a police presence, suggesting it is an area of stricter law enforcement.

Blue may be a more pleasant illuminating color to most people, as opposed to yellow, orange or red (according to some research, such as Lewinski, 1938). In fact, the article quotes from a professor at the end, noting it may just be an "unusualness effect."

Prof. Tsuneo Suzuki at Keio University said: "There are a number of pieces of data to prove blue has a calming effect upon people. However, it's an unusual color for lighting, so people may just feel like avoiding standing out by committing crimes or suicide under such unusual illumination. It's a little risky to believe that the color of lighting can prevent anything."

There is a lot of research into the psychology of color, but not as much has looked into the color of blue illumination itself (as opposed to the color of an object or wall). But some research looking into short wavelength light (blue) has demonstrated that it is a potentially effective treatment for seasonal affective disorder (a seasonal type of depression; see for instance, Glickman, et al., 2006), and helps to reduce the stress response in fish (it hasn't been yet tested on humans).

(Source: psychcentral.com)