

- **conditions that caused the most concern:**

- HIV infection (360 cases, with only a modest decline in recent years). The threat of drug resistance and some evidence of increasing rates of unsafe sex among men who have sex with men suggest that new HIV infections will continue to occur in at least similar numbers;
- hepatitis C (7,737 cases, of whom 80 were reported to be new infections). Identification of new infections is substantially under reported. High risk sharing of injecting equipment is still too common among injecting drug users;
- tuberculosis, with an increase in cases (483, up from 385 in 1998).

Some of the special programs aimed at further preventing illness and implemented in 1999 included:

- the Gonorrhoea Control Campaign that aimed to increase awareness, testing and safe sex among inner city men who have sex with men;
- a new childhood vaccine distribution system that provides vaccines from the new NSW Vaccine Centre to approximately 3,000 clinics in NSW each month;²

- a revised Infection Control Policy for health care facilities;³
- the installation of an improved Notifiable Diseases Database in public health units, and the development of related data performance indicators.

Once again we recognise that comprehensive public health surveillance depends on the notifications we receive from general and specialist medical practices, laboratories, hospitals, schools or childcare centres to public health units. So thanks again, your participation is the foundation on which disease prevention and control systems are built!

REFERENCES

1. NSW Department of Health. Infectious Diseases, NSW, November 1999. *NSW Public Health Bulletin* 1999; 10(11): 154.
2. NSW Department of Health. Infectious Diseases, NSW, July 1999. *NSW Public Health Bulletin* 1999; 10(7): 89.
3. NSW Department of Health. Infectious Diseases, NSW, December 1999. *NSW Public Health Bulletin* 1999; 10(12): 174. ☒

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

24 March 2000

DEAR EDITOR,

Re: *FactSheet* on chickenpox in the March 2000 issue of the *NSW Public Health Bulletin*.

How can I prevent chickenpox? A live attenuated chickenpox vaccine is being launched on 4 April 2000 in Australia, which merits mention in the *Bulletin*. Could this matter be mentioned in the next issue (No. 4) of the *Bulletin* so that the *FactSheet* is brought up to date?

Best wishes.

Professor C.R. Boughton
Vaucluse, NSW

DEAR PROFESSOR BOUGHTON,

Thank you for your letter, which highlights the launch of a vaccine for chickenpox. In the Communicable Diseases Report of this issue of the *Bulletin* (see page 174) we note the licensing of this vaccine and refer readers to the Australian Immunisation Handbook for further information.

The *FactSheet* on chickenpox has been updated and is available through the Department of Health's Web site, and from the Better Health Centre.

Sincerely yours,

Dr Lynne Madden
Editor