

# NEWS AND COMMENT

## PUBLIC HEALTH PROGRAM MEETING

**O**n May 17, 1990 staff of Areas, Regions, universities and the central administration of the Department of Health, NSW met to discuss progress in the development of Public Health Units (PHUs) throughout the State. In opening the meeting, the Deputy Director-General, Mr Ross Wraight emphasised the Department of Health's commitment to developing a strong public health infrastructure in NSW. The Chief Health Officer, Dr Sue Morey pointed out the need for strong local and central public health management and a quality program for developing a professional workforce.

The following are the main points raised during the meeting:

- Area/Regional PHUs' current state of development. The greatest advances were reported from the Eastern, Northern and Western Sydney Area Health Services and the South-Western Region.
- The need for PHU action strategies, a quality public health professional training scheme and strong central support for the infrastructure based on sound epidemiologic practice.
- Development of a proactive rather than reactive media strategy. Assistance is available from the Department to prepare press releases.
- Public health network communications include computer systems under development, the Public Health Bulletin and regular three-monthly meetings of PHU and central administration staff.
- Environmental health resources for PHUs include: the NSW Medical Disaster Plan, the SPCC's Chemical Incidents Procedures Handbook and Area/Regional toxicological databases.
- Health surveyors are key resource people in environmental health investigations. Their role in the new PHUs is currently under review.
- Food inspectors are concerned with reducing the toxic and microbial contamination of food and water and investigating food-related illness complaints. They will collaborate with PHU staff on outbreak investigations.
- Five proposed environmental health epidemiologic priorities were identified: surveillance of toxic exposures; ready access to current information concerning health risks of environmental hazards; timely dissemination of information; ad hoc environmental health studies; and development of protocols for public health action.
- Current infectious disease priorities for NSW include: improving communications between central office and the PHUs; developing microcomputer reporting and surveillance systems;

revising the list of notifiable conditions; developing action protocols for notifiable conditions; developing laboratory-based surveillance mechanisms; developing better databases for tuberculosis, AIDS, HIV infection, and immunisation rates; improving immunisation services; and developing sentinel surveillance mechanisms for influenza and zoonotic diseases.

The meeting closed with agreement that PHU and central administration staff should meet on a regular three-monthly basis.

Contact information on the participants at the conference is set out below (see Keeping in Touch).

## KEEPING IN TOUCH

NAME	AFFILIATION	PHONE NO.	FAX
Dr Robert Arthurson	Orana & Far West Region	(068) 81 2232	(068) 81 2225
Prof Sydney Bell	Eastern Sydney AHS	399 4054	399 1120
Mr Andrew Bernard	South Western Sydney AHS	821 5760	601 8501
Mr Terry Carvan	Health Surveyor	556 9313	810 6747
Mr Ted Charker	Public Health Services	887 5601	888 7210
Dr Stephen Corbett	Epidemiology Branch	217 5195	217 5602
Mr Bruce Cracknell	Public Health Services	887 5612	888 7210
Dr Gordon De Cean	North Coast Region	(066) 23 1144	(066) 21 8077
Dr David Fox	Toxicology Unit	887 5600	888 7210
Dr Michael Frommer	Epidemiology Branch	217 6038	217 5602
Dr Julian Gold	Central and Southern Sydney AHS	332 1090	332 4219
Dr Peter Hlavacek	South Eastern Region	(048) 21 8111	
Dr Eng Ichou	Central Western Region	(063) 32 8935	(063) 32 1235
Dr Mark Jacobs	Orana & Far West Region	(068) 81 2255	(068) 81 2225
Ms Sue Jobson	Epidemiology Branch	217 5434	261 2430
Dr Rod Kennedy	Central Coast AHS	(043) 25 9111	
Prof David Kleinbaum	University of Sydney	692 4381	692 4179
Prof Stephen Leeder	Westmead Hospital	633 6505	689 1049
Dr Michael Levy	Epidemiology Branch	217 6038	217 5602
Dr Peter Lewis	Western Sydney AHS	633 6677	689 1049
Dr David Lyle	Epidemiology Branch	217 6159	217 5602
Dr Jeremy McNulty	Epidemiology Branch	217 6034	217 5602
Dr Hugh Merrell	Hunter AHS	(049) 26 6912	
Mr Geoffrey Richards	Toxicology Unit	887 5605	887 7210
Dr George Rubin	Epidemiology Branch	217 5978	217 5602
Dr Louise Rushworth	Epidemiology Branch	217 6152	217 5602
Mr Des Sibbra	Food Inspection	887 5606	888 2210
Dr Owen Spencer	New England Region	(067) 66 7166	(067) 66 1227
Dr Michael Stanford	Northern Sydney AHS	477 9400	482 1650
Dr Greg Stewart	Southern Sydney AHS	553 2686	988 7574
Mr Greg Thomas	Health Surveyor	556 9313	810 6747
Sr Margaret Thomas	TB Public Health Services	887 5969	888 7210
Mr Michael Ward	Health Promotion Unit (McKell)	217 5827	281 2430
Prof Ian W Webster	South Western Sydney AHS	749 1122	
Dr John Westphalen	Hunter AHS	(049) 56 0309	
Dr Andrew Wilson	Western Sydney AHS	633 6677	689 1049
Dr Noel Wilton	Mental Health Services Unit	217 5620	217 5227
Dr Marilyn Wise	Central Sydney AHS	516 8958	516 8705

## RECOMMENDED AGE FOR MMR REDUCED

**A**t the April meeting of the NSW Infectious Disease Advisory Committee, it was recommended that NSW accept the recommendation of the National Health and Medical Research Council that children be immunised with Measles-Mumps-Rubella vaccine as soon after their first birthday as possible, and no later than age 15 months.

This decision was vindicated by a recent NSW study which found that seroconversion rates to measles and mumps vaccines were no different between 12- and 15-month-old children<sup>1</sup>.

1. Kakakios AM, Burgess MA, Bransby RD et al. Optimal age for measles and mumps vaccination in Australia. *Med J Aust* 1990;152:472-4.



# NEWS AND COMMENT

## NEW MONOGRAPH ON HEART DISEASE

A monograph has just been published by Department of Health, NSW, to help community health staff promote better heart health. The document, "Public screening for risk of heart disease", which is principally authored by Dr Karen Webb, provides guidelines and procedures for screening for cardiovascular risk factors. It can be obtained from the Health Promotion Unit, Department of Health, NSW, Level 23, McKell Bldg, Rawson Place, Sydney — phone (02) 217 6666.

## TRAVEL HEALTH ADVICE

Access is now available for all Public Health Units to the Medical Advisory Service for Travellers Abroad (MASTA). The MASTA system is an information data bank on health and disease risks for overseas travellers which was developed at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. It has been modified to Australian standards through the Tropical Health Program of the University of Queensland. The database, which is updated daily, provides the most up-to-date information on travel health currently available.

The Department of Health encourages all Area/Regional staff concerned with preventing infectious disease in travellers to discuss access to this database with Directors of Public Health Units. Further information can be obtained by contacting Mr Gavin Stewart on (02) 217 6160.

### PUBLIC HEALTH EDITORIAL STAFF

The Bulletin's editorial advisory panel is as follows:

Dr Sue Morey, Chief Health Officer, Department of Health; Professor Stephen Leeder, Professor of Community Medicine, University of Sydney; Professor Geoffrey Berry, Professor of Epidemiology & Biostatistics, University of Sydney; Dr Robert Reznik, Acting Director, Department of Community Medicine, Royal Prince Alfred Hospital; Professor Ian Webster, Professor of Community Medicine, University of NSW; Dr Christine Bennett, Acting Associate Director, Service Development, Department of Health; Dr Michael Frommer, Epidemiologist, Epidemiology & Health Services Evaluation Branch; Ms Jane Hall, Research Officer, Department of Community Medicine, Westmead Hospital; and Mr Michael Ward, Manager, Health Promotions Unit, Department of Health.

The editor is Dr George Rubin, Director, Epidemiology and Health Services Evaluation Branch, Department of Health, NSW.

Design and Production — Health Public Affairs Unit, Department of Health, NSW.

The next issue of the Bulletin will include a letters section in addition to the articles, infectious disease notifications and news and comment sections.

Please send your articles, news, comments or letters to Dr George Rubin — PO. Box K110 Haymarket NSW 2000 or Fax (02) 217 5602.

Suggestions for improving the reporting of infectious diseases are most welcome.

## FOUNDATION FELLOWSHIP

The Australian Faculty of Public Health Medicine was established by the RACP at its May 1990 Annual General Meeting. Medical practitioners registered in Australia who have been predominantly engaged at any time in the practice of public health medicine may be eligible for Foundation Fellowship of the new Faculty.

Persons wishing to be considered for such Fellowship, should write for further information to:—

The Honorary Secretary  
Australian Faculty of Public Health Medicine  
145 Macquarie Street  
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Phone: 247 4461

Fax: 231 3120

### Vibrio Warning

► Continued from page 13

#### EDITORIAL NOTE

The Department of Health recently consulted with senior Sydney physicians on appropriate recommendations for patients with chronic diseases. It was agreed that the risk of contracting *V. vulnificus* infection in NSW is very small. However, patients with chronic hepatic or renal disease, or those on immunosuppressive therapy should be advised to avoid eating oysters during the warmer months particularly after periods of heavy rain.

The Epidemiology and Health Services Evaluation Branch of the Department plans to initiate laboratory-based surveillance of isolations of *V. vulnificus* next spring.

Jeremy McAnulty MB BS, Registrar in Public Health Medicine, Epidemiology & Health Services Evaluation Branch, Department of Health, NSW.

#### References

1. West PA, The human pathogenic Vibrios — a public health update with environmental perspectives. *Epidem Inf*, 1989;103:1-34.
2. Johnston JM, Andes WA, Glasser G, *Vibrio vulnificus*. A gastronomic hazard. *JAMA*, 1983;249:1756-57.
3. Johnston JM, Becker SF, McFarland LM, *Vibrio vulnificus*, man and the sea. *JAMA*, 1985;253:2850-2853.
4. Katz BZ, *Vibrio vulnificus* meningitis in a boy with thalassemia after eating raw oysters. *Pediatrics*, 1988;82:784-786.
5. Morris JG, *Vibrio vulnificus* — a new monster from the deep? *Ann Int Med*, 1988;109:261-263.
6. Blake PA, Merson MH, Weaver RE, Hollis DG and Heublein PC, Disease caused by marine vibrio. *N Engl J Med*, 1979;300:1-5.
7. Hoffmann TJ et al, *Vibrio vulnificus* septicaemia. *Arch Int Med*, 1988;148:1825-1827.
8. Tacket CO, Brenner F, Blake PA, Clinical features and an epidemiological study of *Vibrio vulnificus* infections. *J Infect Dis*, 1984;149:558-561.