

NEWS AND COMMENT

BEACH USER SURVEY 1989-90

During the 1989-90 summer season the Department of Health conducted a Beach User Survey in order to estimate the health risk associated with swimming at Sydney beaches. Preliminary results of this survey were released by the Minister for Health, Mr Peter Collins, on June 4, 1990.

After completion of screening procedures, responses were obtained from 2968 people. Overall, about 24% of respondents reported at least one symptom. Of those who did not swim, 17% reported symptoms. Of those who swam at beaches where the maximum geometric mean coliform count did not exceed 300/100mL ('low pollution'), 27% reported symptoms, while 36% of people who swam at 'high-pollution' beaches (where the count exceeded 300/100mL) reported symptoms.

Compared to non-swimmers, swimmers at 'low pollution' beaches were 1.6 times more likely and swimmers at 'high-pollution' beaches 2.2 times more likely to report selected symptoms. A comprehensive report of this survey is now being compiled by Epidemiology and Health Services Evaluation Branch staff.

NOTIFIABLE DISEASES LIST REVISED

As foreshadowed in the June 1990 issue of the Public Health Bulletin, the New South Wales Infectious Diseases Advisory Committee has approved the final revision of the list of notifiable diseases.

The list contains some important innovations. Laboratory notification will play an important role in the notification of many conditions. Medical practitioners will be requested to notify only 26 diseases, compared with the current list of 52. Sexually-transmitted diseases, with the exception of syphilis, will be notifiable only by STD clinics, and then only in a form that does not identify the clinic client.

It is hoped that the new disease notification system can be implemented by the end of this year, after extensive consultation with Public Health Units and medical practitioners.

PROTOCOLS FOR THE MANAGEMENT OF INFECTIOUS DISEASES

Draft protocols clarifying steps to be taken for the management of notifiable infectious diseases have been circulated to Public Health Units for comment. The drafts aim to standardise the public health approach to these conditions and to reduce the uncertainty among health professionals about what to do upon learning of the occurrence of these conditions. The finalised protocols will lay out steps to be taken from first notification, contact information, management of cases and their contacts, and other public health measures to be taken.

Please contact Dr Michael Levy or Dr Jeremy McAnulty on (02) 217 6165 for further information or suggestions on the drafts.

HEPATITIS B VACCINE FOR HEALTH WORKERS

THE Department recognises that some health care personnel work in situations where the potential exposure to hepatitis B is a regular hazard and recommends that all health care establishments identify staff who have regular contact with bodily fluids or tissue from patients, and advise them to receive hepatitis B vaccine. *The importance of completing the course of three injections is emphasised.*

MANAGEMENT OF HIV IN SURGERY

Guidelines for the management of HIV in surgery were released as a Department of Health Circular in July 1990. The Guidelines are the product of extensive consultation involving the Department, members of the Ministerial Advisory Committee on AIDS Strategy and relevant groups representing the medical profession.

The principles upon which the Guidelines are based reflect the Department's commitment to the provision of a safe working environment for health care personnel and voluntary HIV testing with pre- and post-test counselling for patients.

Key points from the Guidelines are as follows:

- surgical procedures pose a low level of risk for transmission of HIV;
- universal infection control procedures are the most effective means of preventing occupational transmission of HIV;
- testing is not a substitute for proper implementation of infection control procedures;

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- pre-operative testing is appropriate where there is a possibility, first, that a given surgical procedure will adversely affect the health of an HIV-infected patient, and second, that the procedure will pose an unnecessary or avoidable risk of HIV infection to surgical personnel;
- HIV-positive patients are entitled to respect for their confidentiality in accordance with normal ethical practice;
- the same single system of identification of biohazards should be used as for all infectious diseases.

The Guidelines provide health administrators and health-care workers with a framework for the management of surgical patients which should reduce risks associated with occupational exposure to HIV.

Copies of the Guidelines are available from the AIDS Bureau, Department of Health, NSW (phone (02) 217 5747).

PUBLIC HEALTH UNIT MEETING

The second meeting of NSW Public Health Unit staff will be held at Rozelle Hospital on 3 September. The full agenda will include discussion on communications; initiatives in infectious disease, reproductive health, environmental health, chronic disease and injury prevention, and health outcome evaluation; training; the recent report prepared by Health Surveyors; and the neuroblastoma screening program.

TRAVEL HEALTH SEMINAR

A seminar on preventing health problems in overseas travellers will be held at 2:00 pm on 4 September at the Qantas auditorium, George St, Sydney. The session, which is sponsored by Qantas, CSL and MASTA, will include sessions on malaria, dengue, and other topics relevant for travellers and their health advisors. Those interested in attending should contact Ms Sue Jobson on (02) 217 5434.

TUBERCULOSIS SEMINAR

On Wednesday, October 3, 1990 the Community Health and Anti-Tuberculosis Association will hold a seminar on Tuberculosis in the Conference Room, Wallace Wurth Building, Macquarie Hospital, Wicks Rd, North Ryde. The program, beginning at 9:15 am, includes presentations on the epidemiology and eradication of tuberculosis and on the management of persons who are both Mantoux and HIV positive and young contacts of drug resistant cases. Persons interested in attending should contact Dr Roma Thomson on (02) 953 7475.

PUBLIC HEALTH MEDICINE REGISTRARS

On September 1 and 3 the Public Health Division of the Department of Health, NSW will advertise four positions for medical graduates interested in pursuing a career in public health medicine. These positions will allow registrars to rotate through selected public health positions over a period of three years as a part of required training for membership of the newly formed Faculty of Public Health Medicine.

NEW INFORMATION BULLETINS

The Information Centre, Department of Health, NSW, publishes information bulletins on specific topics from time to time. A summary of data from the most recent Bulletin, Mortality in New South Wales 1985 to 1987 (No 14), appears on Page 21 of this issue. Other recent Bulletins include: Child Sexual Assault Centres 1987 Statistics (No 10), AIDS Patients in New South Wales Hospitals, July - December 1987 (No 11), Nursing Homes and Nursing Home Type Patients (No 12), Construction of a Relative Stay Index for New South Wales Hospitals by the Use of Diagnosis Related Groups (No 13). Copies can be obtained from the Information Centre (phone (02) 219 7444).

Correction

The article "Influenza Monitoring" appearing in the June issue incorrectly attributed Figure 3 to Dr J Watson instead of Dr P Gill.

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.

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

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