

## INDEX

FluTracking (1)

Vinegar vs Mould (2)

Wind Turbines (2)

Preparing for Summer Heat Waves (3)

Aboriginal Community Water and Sewerage Program (4)

UV Cabinets marketed as Sterilisers (4)

Garra Rufa Fish Massages (5)

Legionnaires risk from Windscreen Washes (5)

Eggs – a Salmonella Risk? (5)

Conferences & Training (6)

Hunter New England Environmental Health Staff (6)

Position Vacant – HNEPH (6)

Tobacco Advertising Compliance (6)

Environmental Public Health Tracking Network (6)

### Welcome!

Welcome to the Environmental Health Bulletin, the quarterly newsletter which provides information on developments in the field of environmental health. The Bulletin is edited by Hunter New England Population Health and is distributed via email to people working in the field of environmental health within the area covered by Hunter New England Health.

Your contributions, news and feedback are welcome to help ensure the Bulletin is relevant and interesting. Our contact details are on page six.

We would appreciate it if new staff or staff without email, have access to this newsletter. It can also be downloaded from our website at: [http://www.hnehealth.nsw.gov.au/hnep/health\\_environmental\\_health](http://www.hnehealth.nsw.gov.au/hnep/health_environmental_health)

### FluTracking

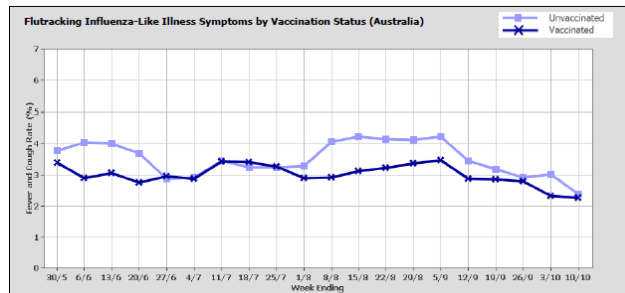
FluTracking was launched in the Australian winter of 2006 with 400 'FluTrackers' completing a weekly online survey about flu-like symptoms. In the winter of 2007 this increased to approximately 800 participants. Currently, over 8000 people participate in the weekly FluTracking survey.

FluTracking is an online health surveillance system used to detect epidemics of influenza. The main aim of FluTracking is to develop a system that can rapidly determine:

- the onset of influenza in Australia and subregions
- the effectiveness of the influenza vaccine
- the severity of circulating influenza strains
- if influenza strains have changed

By comparing the rate of symptoms between vaccinated and unvaccinated participants, we can detect when influenza strikes because the unvaccinated people have much higher rates of illness than the vaccinated people.

FluTracking captures information of influenza symptoms in people across Australia to monitor the spread of influenza and the severity of illness and protection provided by vaccination. This helps to detect both seasonal influenza and hopefully pandemic influenza and other diseases so that the community can be better protected.



FluTracking is always looking for additional participants who live in Australia and have easy access to email on a weekly basis. It doesn't matter if participants are vaccinated or unvaccinated. For additional information or to join FluTracking, visit: <http://www.flutracking.net/>

## Vinegar is a winner against Mould

We are currently experiencing a damp spring which, combined with the warmer temperatures, can bring with it household mould! Recently, Dr Heike Nuemeister-Kemp from Murdoch University was talking about mould in houses on ABC radio. Dr Nuemeister-Kemp confirmed that the only proven way to deal with mould is to find the source of the moisture feeding it, fix it, dry it out, physically remove the mould and then apply chemicals, but only in the right dilutions so that they work effectively.

A common mould question is: "Does mould cause health problems?" Some types of mould can lead to health problems. Symptoms may include a runny nose, eye irritation, cough, congestion, asthma-related problems or respiratory infections. Other reported symptoms include fatigue, nausea and headaches. Many of the symptoms are consistent with an allergy picture.

Interestingly, research shows the most effective chemical solution against mould, is our favourite salad dressing - vinegar. It is successful because it actually kills mould, and at the same time doesn't introduce a new chemical pollutant into the indoor air. Vinegar is also an effective disinfectant. A point to note is that only white fermented vinegar seems to work, as synthetic acetic acid does not appear to be as effective.

Diluted alcohol comes a close second, but there are a number of issues concerning its acquisition, storage, handling and OHS, PPE, duty of care and its effects on some surfaces that make it difficult to recommend.



Additional information can be found at:  
<http://www.mould.com.au>

The Homeowners Guide to Fighting Mould can be downloaded from the Hunter New England Health Website at:  
<http://www.hnehealth.nsw.gov.au/hnepf/>

## Wind Turbines – a Health Hazard?

The NHMRC has released a statement assessing the possible health issues surrounding wind turbines. Wind power has been gaining prominence as a viable sustainable alternative to other forms of energy production but not without controversy, which is commonly found with new technology. Those who oppose the development of wind farms contend that wind turbines can adversely impact the health of individuals living in close proximity.



The report is in two parts:

**Public Statement** - The Public Statement presents the current evidence relating to potential health impacts of wind turbines on people living in close proximity. The Statement concludes that there is currently no published scientific evidence to positively link wind turbines with adverse health effects.

**Evidence Review** - The Evidence Review presents findings from a rapid review of the evidence from current literature on the issue of wind turbines and potential impacts on human health. The Review focuses on concerns regarding the adverse health impacts of infrasound, noise, electromagnetic interference, shadow flicker and blade glint produced by wind turbines.

The statement and the evidence review can be downloaded from:  
<http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/publications/synopses/new0048.htm>

## Preparing for Summer Heat Waves

With summer fast approaching it is important to remind the public how to prepare for potential heat waves that may be experienced in areas across Hunter New England.

Heatwaves are said to be the most under-rated weather hazard in Australia, essentially because they are viewed as a 'passive' hazard in contrast to the more widely studied catastrophic hazards such as cyclones and earthquakes. Studies have shown that heatwaves can kill more people than any other natural hazard experienced in Australia!

### What is a heat wave?

The definition varies according to location. A heat wave can generally be defined as:

- Maximum daily temperatures exceeding 35°C for 3 days or more and / or
- Minimum daily temperatures exceeding 23°C for 3 days or more

### What are the risks?

The human body is adapted to maintaining a stable body temperature in ambient temperatures not exceeding 32 degrees. Above this temperature, the body's ability to cope depends on the balance between heat input and heat output.

People at greatest risk of harm from high temperatures are:

- over the age of 65
- babies and young children
- pregnant and breastfeeding
- obese
- those on some medications, either prescription or illicit
- those who are not acclimatised to the heat, e.g. new arrivals, visitors
- those who have underlying medical conditions, especially cardiovascular disease
- athletes
- manual labourers
- the disabled



### What can you do to reduce your risk and the risk to others?

1. Listen to the weather forecasts, updates and alerts on the radio and television
2. Drink plenty of fluid (not alcohol or caffeinated drinks). Note: if your doctor normally limits your fluid intake or you are on fluid tablets, you may need to check with your doctor how much to drink while the weather is hot.
3. Wear light, loose-fitting clothing
4. Limit physical activity
5. Find a cool place, in the shade or in a well ventilated shelter with fans or air conditioned room
6. Cool down periodically in water (swimming pool, shower, bath)
7. Keep windows & doors shut and curtains closed. As soon as the outdoor temperature drops below the indoor temperature, open curtains, windows & doors to allow the breeze to cool the room/house
8. Ensure that young children drink plenty of fluid and are dressed in appropriate clothing
9. Keep in touch with elderly neighbours, family & friends. Check how they are coping in the heat.

For further information visit

<http://www.emergency.health.nsw.gov.au/heat/index.asp>

### Trees save lives in heat waves

Trees are known to give a range of environmental benefits, but new research suggests that they also play an important role in saving human lives during heatwaves.

A National Tree Symposium in Adelaide was told recently, that trees in urban landscapes are undervalued and often unappreciated.

One of the best ways urban environments can be cooled, particularly under heat wave conditions, is by reincorporating water and vegetation back into the environment.

Trees reduce the heat-island effect and watering these trees has a tremendously beneficial effect in dealing with long periods of heat. With increased housing density, it appears that the urban tree is very much under threat!

For more information go to:

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2010/09/03/3001619.htm>

## Aboriginal Community Water and Sewerage Program

In September, Hunter New England Environmental Health along with Purfleet Aboriginal Community, Summervale Community and Walcha Shire Council commenced participation in a NSW-wide program to evaluate the drinking water quality available in communities and at the same time evaluate the Colisure Water Testing Kit.

When drinking water samples are collected from towns and cities they are expected to reach a laboratory within 24 hours. This isn't easy when sampling in rural and remote communities and especially in Indigenous communities in regional Australia. Over the last ten years, the Colisure Water Testing Kit has been used as a precautionary measure in many drinking water quality monitoring programs in rural and remote towns and communities throughout Australia for onsite detection of bacterial contamination. The Colisure kit is easy to use with a simple colour changing system caused by the presence or absence of coliforms and *E. coli*.

The Colisure test uses a clean sample container, which HNEPH supplies to the communities. It is filled with 100 millilitres of water. The reagent is then poured in and it is incubated in a small, heated box for 24 hours. If the sample turns yellow, it indicates a clear result. If the sample turns a pink-red colour, this indicates the presence of total coliform bacteria contamination in the water. The sample is then placed under an ultraviolet lamp. If the sample fluoresces, then *E. coli* bacteria are present, indicating faecal contamination.



yellow = negative    pink = +ve total coliforms    fluorescent = +ve *E. coli*

The evaluation of the Colisure kit involves collecting parallel water samples every two weeks over a six month period. This requires the collection of two water samples at the same time from the same collection point; one collected by the Community Water Sampler to be tested and analysed using the Colisure test kit and the other collected by Council or by a HNEPH EHO and sent to a NATA accredited laboratory for analysis. This sampling program is in addition to existing NSW Drinking Water Monitoring Sampling.

## UV Cabinets marketed and used as 'Sterilisers' in the Beauty Industry

NSW Health has been concerned that some UV cabinets are being marketed and used as sterilisers in the beauty industry. The Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) has identified only one UV cabinet on the Australian Register of Therapeutic Goods (ARTG). This product has an intended purpose of storing instruments in an environment that prevents bacterial growth in pre-sterilised instruments. The TGA believes that this is the intended purpose of most UV cabinets.

The device on the ARTG is:

ARTG entry - 161297

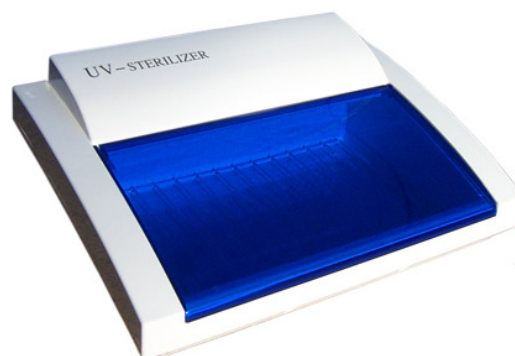
Sponsor - In Vitro Technologies PTY LTD

Product - Endoscope drying/storage chamber

Intended purpose - A dedicated closed chamber designed to dry and store flexible endoscopes and their accessories of any type in a storage environment that prevents bacterial growth. Using high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filtered air heated to 37 degrees the pre-sterilised endoscopes are dried both inside and out.

The TGA is requesting the details of any UV cabinets that you may come across during your inspections which are being marketed as sterilisers. The devices will be investigated with the aim of prohibiting their use as sterilisers.

Environmental Health Officers have powers under the Public Health (Skin Penetration) Regulation 2000 to prevent these cabinets from being used as sterilisers, as they clearly do not sterilise. However to prevent these products from being marketed as sterilisers it is necessary for details to be provided to the TGA.



Example of a UV cabinet being marketed as a steriliser.

For further information contact Anne Ford, Snr Policy Analyst, NSW Health by phoning (02) 9816 0225 or email: [anne.ford@doh.health.nsw.gov.au](mailto:anne.ford@doh.health.nsw.gov.au)

## Garra Rufa Fish Massages

NSW Health has received a number of enquiries regarding the use and approval of Garra Rufa Fish as a form of massage/treatment. Whilst NSW Health is not an approval agency, it does have concerns about the use of the Garra Rufa Fish as a form of massage/treatment.

There are hygiene issues associated with customers being in contact with water which cannot be treated with a residual disinfectant such as chlorine or bromine. Apparently most systems use a form of Ozone or UV treatment for their water, which is unlikely to prevent the growth of microorganisms.

To date, NSW Health is not aware of any Garra Rufa Fish treatment establishments in NSW. If Local Councils become aware of any in their area, they are advised to utilise the 'Health and Safety' Orders under the Local Government Act/Regulation.

The impact these treatments can have on the environment should also be considered. If these exotic fish are released into the natural environment or inappropriately disposed of into local waterways, they can create havoc in the Australian aquatic environment introducing disease and preying on endemic species. The release of the *Gambusia spp.* promoted as the "mosquito fish", into Australian waterways is a good example of the destruction such exotic species can cause.

By coincidence, an Officer from NSW Health's Environmental Health Branch recently visited Thailand and experienced the fish treatment.



Garra Rufa Fish foot treatment in Thailand – it is said to be "more like being bitten by Piranha's than having a massage!" Obviously ... it's each to their own!

## Legionnaires risk from windscreen washers

Inhaling water droplets sprayed from windshield washers may be another way of contracting Legionnaires disease. This was one of the findings from a study published in the June 2010 issue of the European Journal of Epidemiology.

The Health Protection Agency in the United Kingdom conducted a study to determine why professional drivers were five times as likely to acquire Legionnaires' disease as the general population in England and Wales. After finding that most of the drivers who contracted the disease drove cars that did not have chemically treated windshield washer fluid, the researchers found that the chemicals in screenwash kill *Legionella* bacteria that may otherwise thrive in stagnant washer water. They advised using screenwash instead of untreated water. Subsequent testing found *Legionella* in one in five cars that did not have screenwash, but in zero cars that did. The full article can be downloaded at:

<http://www.springerlink.com/content/t92532v54003150g/fulltext.pdf>

## Not so Egg-cellent!

A recent United States (US) article on eggs being recalled highlighted the potential challenge posed by salmonella in the egg industry.

The article reported on a national salmonella outbreak that led to the recall of 500 million eggs and renewed questions about whether it's feasible to keep the microbe out of the henhouse. The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has reported that hundreds of people have been sickened in the outbreak, which appears to have started in May 2010. CDC epidemiologist Christopher Braden said that there may be thousands of illnesses, although fortunately no reported deaths. Californian health officials say at least 266 people in that state were sick.



Closer to home in New South Wales, an Albury take-away restaurant was recently fined \$1,300 following a salmonella outbreak earlier this year. One hundred and seventy people were sick in January when they ate a contaminated home-made raw egg mayonnaise from the Albury Burger Bar.

The New South Wales Food Authority said the business has been fined for selling unsafe food and handling food in an unsafe manner. The food premise has been placed on the New South Wales Department's "name and shame" list.

## Conferences & Training

On-site Wastewater Management training course  
Lismore, NSW 3-5 November 2010  
Details: Zoe Slater, CET Ph. 4954 4997

Environmental Health: Innovation and Diversity  
2010 National EHA Conference  
Melbourne, Vic 17-19 November 2010  
Details: Ph. 03 9018 9332 or  
[adam@conferencemanagement.com.au](mailto:adam@conferencemanagement.com.au)

EHA (NSW Inc) & NSW Health Water Unit  
Water Seminar  
Sydney, NSW 22 November 2010  
Details: Margaret Hind E: [nsw@eh.org.au](mailto:nsw@eh.org.au)

Public Health Emergency Management (I) Training for  
Health Professionals  
Sydney, 23-25 November 2010  
Details: [Christopher.Williams@hnehealth.nsw.gov.au](mailto:Christopher.Williams@hnehealth.nsw.gov.au)

Erosion and Sediment Control Workshops  
Penrith, NSW 1-2 & 8-9 December 2010  
Details: Zoe Slater, CET Ph. 4954 4997  
**NEW WEBSITE:** [www.environmentaltraining.com.au](http://www.environmentaltraining.com.au)

TAFE NSW - Food Safety Auditors Course  
Sydney, 6-10 December 2010  
Details: Tom Johnson Ph. (02) 9217 5487 or  
E: [tom.johnson15@tafensw.edu.au](mailto:tom.johnson15@tafensw.edu.au)

## Hunter New England Environmental Health Staff

Dr. David Durrheim, Service Director - Health Protection

**Newcastle:** Philippe Porigneaux, EH Mgr / SEHO  
Chris Williams, EHO  
Carolyn Herlihy, EHO (Thurs, Fri)  
Nichole Ansell, Trainee EHO  
Cindy Gliddon, EHO (Mon, Tues, Wed)  
Kelly Main, EHO (Mon, Tues)

**Taree:** Hannah Ballard, Trainee EHO

**Tamworth:** Glenn Pearce, SEHO  
Fidelis Jaravani, EHO  
Ruth Williams, Trainee EHO

## Position Vacant- HNEPH

Environmental Health Officer (Position No: 69055)  
The position is available to both full-time and part-time  
applicants with location negotiable between Newcastle,  
Taree and Tamworth. Full position details at:  
<https://www.ezisuite.net/eziJob/HNE/HRRegistry/default.cfm?act=viewVacancy&type=W&vid=169222&src=6>

Enquiries: Philippe Porigneaux, Ph. 02 4924 6494 or  
E: [philippe.porigneaux@hnehealth.nsw.gov.au](mailto:philippe.porigneaux@hnehealth.nsw.gov.au)  
Closing Date: 22 October 2010 (negotiate for  
submission of late applications)

## Tobacco Advertising Compliance 100% for Gloucester

HNEPH EHOs are currently conducting Tobacco  
Advertising compliance inspections across the region.  
Earlier this month, all premises selling tobacco in the  
town of Gloucester were inspected.

Tobacco legislation sets out requirements for the  
display of tobacco, pricing boards, price tickets,  
compulsory signage and points of sale of cigarettes. It  
is pleasing to report that all premises complied 100%  
with the legislation and tobacco advertising  
requirements. Well done Gloucester!!

## Environmental Public Health Tracking Network

To help identify the role certain environmental issues  
play in health, the Connecticut Department of Public  
Health has launched the Environmental Public  
Health Tracking Network website that allows the  
public to access critical environmental  
health information.

Data can be broken down by population, age and  
county. Topics tracked by the site include air quality,  
water quality, childhood lead poisoning, asthma and  
birth defects. The goal of the program is to close  
gaps in knowledge about how the environment  
affects health.

Visit: <http://www.ctpost.com/news/article/New-site-aims-to-track-link-between-health-646316.php>

## Hunter New England Population Health

Newcastle Office  
Locked Bag 10  
Wallsend NSW 2287  
P: (02) 4924 6477 or (02) 4924 6499  
F: (02) 4924 6490

Tamworth Office  
PO Box 597  
Tamworth NSW 2340  
P: (02) 6764 8000  
F: (02) 6766 3003

Taree Office  
PO Box 966  
Taree NSW 2430  
P: (02) 6515 1853  
F: (02) 6515 1804

**After hours:** P: (02) 4924 6499, request EHO on call P: (02) 6764 8000 P: (02) 4924 6499, request EHO on call

Email: [phenquiries@hnehealth.nsw.gov.au](mailto:phenquiries@hnehealth.nsw.gov.au)  
Internet: [www.hnehealth.nsw.gov.au/hnep/](http://www.hnehealth.nsw.gov.au/hnep/)