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**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. Email [cindy.gliddon@hnehealth.nsw.gov.au](mailto:cindy.gliddon@hnehealth.nsw.gov.au) to be added to the email list. This edition of the newsletter and past copies can be downloaded from: [http://www.hnehealth.nsw.gov.au/hnep/health\\_environmental\\_health](http://www.hnehealth.nsw.gov.au/hnep/health_environmental_health)

## ‘Scores on Doors’ goes State-wide

Councils within the Hunter New England area will be gearing up for the year-long voluntary trial of the *Scores on Doors* program which is being rolled out across the State this month. The trial is a follow up to the *Scores on Doors* pilot program which ran last year. Scores on Doors is part of the NSW Government’s strategy to reduce foodborne illness while improving overall food safety in the retail food sector.

The 12 month trial follows the success of the six month pilot held last year across 20 different local council areas including Cessnock, Greater Taree and Newcastle Councils.

Under the *Scores on Doors* trial program, participating retail food outlets are assigned a star rating dependent upon their level of performance. Top rating businesses receive a five star rating, with four and three stars also awarded to businesses that perform well and comply with the requirements of the Food Standards Code.

*Scores on Doors* also offers businesses an opportunity to show customers how seriously they take food hygiene. Certificates from the voluntary program will be displayed near doorways of participating retail food outlets so that customers will be able to see how well restaurants, cafés or other outlets have performed during their food safety inspection.

Rating	Definition
★★★★★ Excellent	The business has achieved the highest level of compliance with food safety standards.
★★★★ Very Good	The business has very good food safety practices in place. Some minor areas where standards were not met will need to be addressed.
★★★ Good	The business has a good standard of food safety compliance. A number of areas, although not serious, need to be corrected.

In accordance with the NSW Food Authority’s enforcement policy Council Environmental Health Officers will take immediate action if they inspect a food business that does not meet required food safety standards.

For further information go to:

<http://www.foodauthority.nsw.gov.au/consumers/other-food-topics/scores-on-doors/>

## EHO Response to the Manning River Floods

Extremely heavy rain on the East Coast of NSW in mid-June 2011 led to flooding in many areas. In particular, the Manning River in Greater Taree reached its highest peak for 30 years. The flooding caused significant damage and isolation for some communities.



Manning River in flood – 16 June 2011

On 16 June, Hunter New England Population Health (HNEPH) received an urgent request from the local Health Services Functional Area Commander (HSFAC) to assess public health risks at Manning Point. Manning Point is a small community located on Mitchell's Island, very close to the mouth of the northern arm of the Manning River. The community had become cut off by road; however two Environmental Health Officers were flown into the community by a Rural Fire Service helicopter.



Helicopter transport to flooded regions.

Assessments were made of the evacuation centre at the local bowling club, two caravan parks (one of which was flooded), a riverside restaurant that had been completely inundated, sewerage issues, and flooded residential areas. Information was provided to residents regarding cleaning up after floods.

Resources on this topic can be found at:  
<http://www.emergency.nsw.gov.au/flood> .



Inundated - Weeroona Caravan Park



Caravan Park under water

Back in the office the Environmental Health team were in contact with Environmental Health Officers from flood affected Local Government Areas including Greater Taree, Gloucester Shire, Dungog Shire, Great Lakes, and Upper Hunter. HNEPH was very appreciative of the level of detail and promptness of the response provided by Councils and their assistance with the overall public health response.



Maintenance to sewerage during floods



Portable toilets for residents while sewer is out of action

It is timely to emphasise the important role of Environmental Health Officers as key players in emergency response situations such as these recent floods. It is imperative that the skills and experience of Environmental Health Officers is backed up with specific emergency management training. If you or any EHOs in your office require training, please contact Mr Chris Williams in our Newcastle office on 4924 6481 for further information.

## National mandatory folic acid fortification survey



During October 2010 to March 2011 enforcement agencies from WA, QLD, NSW, VIC, SA and TAS carried out the 'National mandatory folic acid fortification of wheat flour for making bread compliance survey' at 21 flour mills across Australia. The survey assessed how effective the flour mills were in complying with the folic acid requirements of Standard 2.1.1 of the Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code (the Code).

Standard 2.1.1 of the Code prescribes the level of fortification between 2 - 3mg/kg of folic acid in wheat flour for making bread. At each mill a questionnaire was conducted and one sample of wheat flour for making bread was collected and submitted for folic acid analysis.

Results confirmed that millers were able to meet the new requirements. Folic acid was present in all wheat flour samples analysed. The survey report is currently being drafted and considered by the relevant working groups.

For additional Information, go to:  
<http://www.aihw.gov.au/publication-detail/?id=10737418875&tab=2>

## No Need for 'Rat Catchers' in Hunter New England



A recent report from the Department of Primary Industries reported large numbers of mice in western areas of NSW. During the past couple of months mice have caused considerable damage to crops during sowing, to emerging shoots, unprotected fodder and stored grain. The current climatic conditions have been conducive to a mouse plague, following the prolonged drought. Across many parts of NSW, landholders reported an increase in mouse activity, particularly when they prepared for and commenced winter sowing, and conducted burn-off in preparation for sowing and grain storage.

Mouse numbers appear at their highest in parts of Western NSW, while medium levels of mouse activity and damage have been reported in Central West, Darling, Lachlan and Riverina Districts. To date, areas of Hunter New England have not reported higher than normal levels of mouse activity, but are on alert. For additional Information go to:

<http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/agriculture/pests-weeds/vertebrate-pests/mice>

## NAIDOC 2011

For this year's NAIDOC celebrations, Environmental Health teamed up with the Aboriginal Health Unit (AHU) and other health stakeholders at the Westlakes Family Fun Day at the Toronto foreshore.

To coincide with this year's NAIDOC theme, "Change – the next step is ours", the AHU organised a fun interactive activity that involved the community learning about various health issues from each of the represented health services; including the Heart Foundation, Diabetes NSW and Environmental Health. Participants were required to visit eight stalls and answer questions pertaining to each health service.

The Environmental Health display focussed on Mr Germ to promote and encourage good hygiene - in a fun away. Messages included:

- washing hands before handling or eating food,
- washing hands after going to the toilet or touching animals,
- keeping homes clean — especially kitchens, toilets and bathrooms,
- taking care when cooking and serving family meals,
- keeping yards and pet areas clean, and
- keeping animals out of the house.



Nichole with 'Mr Germ' before the crowds arrived.

At the AHU stall the participants were handed a "Healthy, Black and Deadly" bag, a questionnaire and were given a brief overview of the activity. Once participants had visited all the stalls and answered the questions correctly, they returned to the AHU stall for their promotional goodies e.g. hat, stress ball, wrist bands. Over 250 Indigenous people participated in the activities throughout the day.

## Public Health Act 2010 – drinking water management plans & consultation

The *Public Health Act 2010* has been passed by Parliament and is expected to commence in 2012. The Act will require drinking water suppliers to establish, and adhere to, a quality assurance program that complies with the Regulation (which is currently being developed). Later this year NSW Health will undertake a period of consultation on the draft Regulation, including consultation with local councils and water utilities.

It is proposed that the Regulation will require water suppliers to implement a quality assurance program (or risk-based drinking water management plan) consistent with the Framework for the Management of Drinking Water Quality in the *Australian Drinking Water Guidelines 2004*. This approach is considered best-practice to ensure safe drinking water. It is consistent with the National Water Initiative's *National Performance Report* and the NSW Office of Water's *Best Practice Management of Water Supply and Sewerage Guidelines*.

Implementation of a risk-based drinking water management plan will benefit not only large regional utilities but also those that may be more vulnerable to contamination events including small and remote communities. In developing a management plan, water suppliers should undertake a risk assessment from catchment to consumer and develop critical control points to ensure unsafe water is not released into the distribution systems. Training and planning for incidents or emergencies will also be required.

NSW Health acknowledges the work already undertaken by water utilities that have developed management plans. NSW Health is currently preparing templates and guidance material to help water utilities develop management plans and will work with utilities and NSW Office of Water to support the implementation of the new Regulation.



The *Public Health Act 2010* is available at:  
[http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/nsw/consol\\_act/pha2010126/](http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/nsw/consol_act/pha2010126/)

## Hendra Virus

Hendra virus is a virus that mainly infects large flying foxes (fruit bats). The virus can be passed on to horses when they come into contact with the body fluids of flying foxes (eg feed contaminated from fruit bats roosting, feeding or flying overhead). In infected horses, the symptoms of Hendra virus may include fever, nervous and respiratory illness, abnormal behaviour and rapid death.

The infection has occasionally been passed onto people who have been in close contact with an infected horse. Common initial symptoms of Hendra Virus in people may include; fever, cough, sore throat, headache and tiredness. Meningitis or encephalitis can then develop, causing headache, high fever, and drowsiness, convulsions and coma. Hendra virus infection can be fatal in humans.

The Hendra virus has been confirmed in a number of horses in northern NSW and South East Queensland during July 2011. This suggests that Hendra virus is currently circulating in the bat population in these areas. A dog in Queensland from an affected property also had evidence of Hendra infection.



### How is Hendra Virus Spread?

Hendra virus infection in horses and humans is very rare. All seven confirmed human cases to date became infected following close contact with the body fluids of an infectious horse either through inhaling respiratory secretions or contracting the virus in their eyes, nose, mouth or on their skin.

People who suspect a horse may be infected with Hendra virus have a legal obligation to contact Primary Industries or call the Emergency Animal Disease hotline on 1800 675 888. For details visit <http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au>

If there is a human health concern, people are advised to contact their local doctor or nearest Public Health Unit. For further information go to: <http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/factsheets/infectious/hendra.html>

## Benefits of Needle and Syringe Exchange Programs

Needle and syringe exchange programs (NSPs) were piloted in NSW in 1986 and are now a major public health success story. Whilst the program can attract community concerns because of the perception that they make illicit drug use more 'visible', it is now recognised that NSPs actually provide protection and harm minimisation for local communities. There are over 800 NSPs in NSW and many Councils in HNE participate in the program.

A recent report on cost effectiveness of NSPs in Australia highlights that there has been:

- a reduction of intravenous drug users in NSW over the last decade,
- a reduction of needles and syringes distributed for the same period,
- an estimated 23,000+ cases of HIV infections averted due to NSPs in NSW,
- an estimated 31,000+ cases of Hepatitis C infections averted due to NSPs in NSW, and
- continuing funding at the same level for the next 10 years will save \$1.55 billion in health costs.

At a national level, investment in NSPs saved \$1.28 billion in health care costs between 2000-2009. For every dollar invested in NSPs during 2000-09 \$27 is returned in cost savings. This included patient costs and productivity gains/losses.

The Needle Clean Up Hotline provides information about removing discarded needles and syringes from public places. Freecall 1800 633 353

## Garra Rufa Fish Massages

You may recall a previous article (*EH Bulletin, October 2010*) outlining the concerns NSW Health has with the use and approval of Garra rufa fish as a form of massage/treatment. Clearly 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.

Additional information has been provided by the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service (AQIS) which states that Garra rufa fish cannot be imported into Australia under any circumstances.

The AQIS allows the importation of approved species of live marine and freshwater fish to Australia for use in the ornamental aquarium trade for display purposes only. Live marine or freshwater fish **are not** permitted to be imported into Australia for therapeutic use. Please note that the Garra rufa species is not on the AQIS permitted species list and therefore cannot be imported to Australia for ornamental aquarium trade either.

To date, NSW Health is not aware of any Garra rufa fish treatment establishments in NSW.



Garra rufa fish foot treatment in Thailand

## Radiation Control Regulation 2003

A review of the *Radiation Control Regulation 2003*, has resulted in the extension of the classes of people who may not be exposed to ultraviolet (UV) radiation from artificial tanning units. Anyone under 30 and people with skin phototype 2 may not be admitted into artificial tanning units. UV-emitting tanning devices are classified by the International Agency for Research on Cancer as carcinogenic to humans.

NSW Health advises that *all* users of solaria are at increased risk of melanoma and squamous cell carcinoma, with no evidence that they receive any health benefit. NSW Health applauds all efforts to reduce the population's exposure to these devices. While the amendment is an acceptable interim measure which will protect those at greatest risk, NSW Health considers that it would be scientifically and ethically justifiable to completely ban these devices.

## Synthetic Cannabis Banned

Until recently synthetic cannabis, that mimics the effects of marijuana, was sold legally at adult shops, tobacconists and herbal retailers in Australia. After representations by NSW Health and other health and medical agencies, there has been an amendment to the Drug Misuse and Trafficking Act to prohibit the supply and possession of synthetic cannabinoids (eg Kronic).

These amendments were published and commenced on Friday 8 July 2011.



This means that any information concerning the sale and use of Kronic, or similar synthetic cannabinoids, received by NSW Health will be passed on to the Police.

## Conferences & Training

Erosion and Sediment Control Workshops  
Penrith, NSW 18-19 & 25-26 August 2011  
Details: Zoe Slater, CET Ph. 4954 4997  
[www.environmentaltraining.com.au](http://www.environmentaltraining.com.au)

Environmental Health Australia (NSW inc)  
Food Surveillance School 2011  
**One Day Advanced Workshop**  
Merrylands Sydney, 24 August, 2011  
Details: Margaret Hind [nsw@eh.org.au](mailto:nsw@eh.org.au)

Environmental Health Australia (NSW inc)  
Food Surveillance School 2011  
Merrylands Sydney, 24 - 26 August, 2011  
Details: Margaret Hind [nsw@eh.org.au](mailto:nsw@eh.org.au)

NSW Health - Infection Control and Sterilisation  
Workshop for Environmental Health Officers  
Inspecting Skin Penetration Premises  
Ultimo TAFE, 19 September 2011  
Details: Melinda Lawler, NSW Health ph. 9816 0589

8<sup>th</sup> National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander  
Environmental Health Conference  
Darwin, 27-30 September 2011  
Details: (03) 9018 9332 or [adam@natsieh.com.au](mailto:adam@natsieh.com.au)

Oceania Tobacco Control 2011  
Burying the Habit: Moving to a tobacco free future  
Indigenous Pre-Conference Workshop  
Brisbane, 17 October 2011  
Details: [www.ceitc.org.au](http://www.ceitc.org.au)

Environmental Health Australia (NSW inc)  
Protection of Environment Operations Act Workshop  
Queanbeyan, 9-10 November 2011  
Details: Margaret Hind [nsw@eh.org.au](mailto:nsw@eh.org.au)

Public Health Emergency Management Training  
for Health Professionals  
Sydney, 22-24 November 2011  
Details: [Christopher.Williams@hnehealth.nsw.gov.au](mailto:Christopher.Williams@hnehealth.nsw.gov.au)

## Considering a Trainee EHO?

Since 1997, the NSW Health Aboriginal Environmental Health Training Program has provided university study and workplace support for Aboriginal people to become EHOs. To date, there are 11 graduates and seven current trainees in the Program – including a newly appointed Trainee at Camden Council in partnership with NSW Health and Sydney South West Public Health Unit.

NSW Health is keen to form partnerships with Local Government to expand this successful program.

Trainee EHOs are required to complete a Bachelor of Applied Science (Environment and Health) by distance learning. As a funding and training partner, NSW Health will provide 50 per cent of the total cost of the Training Program for the duration of the study requirement (approximately six years) and joint supervision of the Trainee with the local Public Health Unit to fulfil a number of work based competencies.

If you are interested in discussing a partnership between your Council and NSW Health, please contact Mr Jeff Standen, Manager Aboriginal Environmental Health Unit on: (02) 98595186 or [jeff.standen@doh.health.nsw.gov.au](mailto:jeff.standen@doh.health.nsw.gov.au)

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Cindy Gliddon, EHO (Mon, Tues, Wed)  
Carolyn Herlihy, EHO (Thurs, Fri)  
Kelly Main, EHO (Mon, Tues)

**Taree:** Hannah Ballard, Trainee EHO

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