

# Hunter New England and Central Coast Public Health Units

## Communicable Diseases Report

### January 2018

Hot weather and health issues:

Heat stress, gastroenteritis, mosquito-borne disease and flying fox exposures

Hepatitis C treatment

**Extreme heat** and outdoor activities lead to public health risks in summer months including heat stress and dehydration, gastroenteritis, mosquito borne disease and exposure to flying foxes as adult flying foxes and pups are prone to drop to the ground and encourage rescuing.

The NSW Health emergency preparedness website has a range of useful resources to help ['beat the heat'](#).

Remember the 4 key messages to keep you and others healthy in the heat



(NSW Health)

**Gastroenteritis:** foodborne disease outbreaks tend to occur over the summer months due to higher ambient temperatures encouraging bacterial growth in poorly refrigerated foods and group gatherings for BBQs and outdoor banquets. Salmonella is the most likely agent with campylobacter also possible. These illnesses are often associated with temperature abuse and through raw poultry meat and eggs cross-contaminating chopping boards and other surfaces where cooked food and salads are placed. A foodborne disease outbreak affecting large groups or at least two or more households should be reported to the public health unit. Advice for [preventing foodborne disease](#):

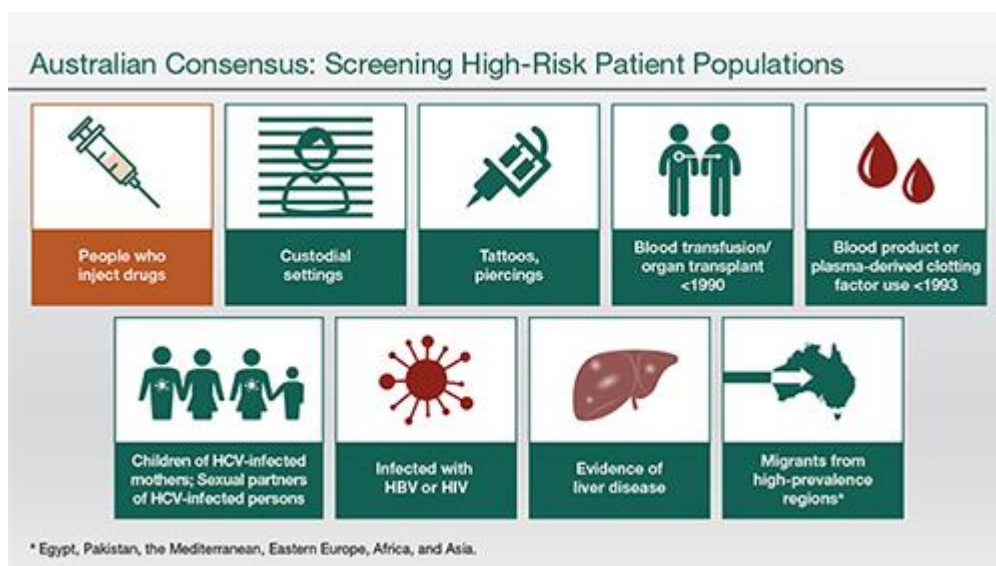
- Washing your hands
- Separating raw and cooked foods
- Cooking food thoroughly
- Keeping food at safe temperatures (cold (<5C) or hot (>60C))
- Using safe raw materials (avoid unpasteurised foods or foods past expiry, wash fruit and vegetables)

**Arboviral diseases** such as Ross River and Barmah Forest virus are more likely to occur in summer months when outdoor activities coincide with increased mosquito numbers. [Measures to protect against mosquito bites](#) are encouraged. Current surveillance indicates high mosquito numbers in southern inland NSW but recent high tides make coastal areas vulnerable too.

**Flying fox exposure:** extreme temperatures can be lethal for flying foxes and particularly the pups when they are likely to drop from roosts and pose a hazard to humans' attempting rescue. Bats are reservoirs of the [Australian bat lyssavirus \(ABLV\)](#), a potentially lethal zoonotic virus and any contact should be reported to Public Health to determine the need for prophylaxis.

**Influenza:** activity increased in North America and parts of Europe. Travellers to the northern hemisphere over their winter are reminded to update their influenza vaccine at least two weeks before departure.

**Hepatitis C treatment update.** [Hepatitis C](#) is caused by a virus that infects the liver and can lead to long-term liver disease, cirrhosis and liver cancer. It is usually [diagnosed through screening asymptomatic people](#) or investigating signs or symptoms of chronic liver disease. Following the introduction of the new Direct Acting Antiviral Agents on the PBS in March 2016, over 2114 people have commenced treatment in the Hunter New England region. For most people the treatment duration is only 12 weeks with few side effects and a cure rate of over 95%. These effective new treatments are easily managed in general practice with GPs in an ideal position to screen people who may have been at risk and are unaware of their hepatitis C status as well as offer treatment (see [Local HealthPathway](#), search 'chronic hepatitis C').



## **Immunisation**

**Vaccination for child care.** The NSW Parliament has passed a Bill to amend the Public Health Act 2010 to strengthen [vaccination enrolment requirements in child care](#) (early childhood education and care).

From 1 January 2018 children who are unvaccinated due to parental conscientious objection cannot be enrolled in child care

The vast majority of children will be unaffected by the changes as over 93% of children in NSW are fully vaccinated at one and five years of age (see [HealthStatsNSW](#)) and in December 2015, conscientious objection affected only 1.15% of children aged 0-7 years in NSW. Children who cannot be fully vaccinated due to a medical condition or who are on a recognised catch-up schedule will still be able to be enrolled upon presentation of the appropriate form signed by a medical practitioner. The new requirements do not change other existing provisions. A register of the age appropriate vaccination documentation still needs to be maintained for each child and in the event of a specified vaccine preventable disease outbreak in a child care centre the public health officer can exclude children who are not vaccinated for that disease to protect them from infection and prevent them from passing disease to others.

**Funded influenza vaccine for children:** The NSW government will provide influenza vaccine for all children 6 months to 4 years (ie under 5 years of age) of age in NSW. Information has been sent to all GP practices and [information for consumers](#) is available on the NSW Health website.

## Communicable disease notifications:

**Table 1.** Summary of selected notifiable conditions (YTD\* by year), 2014 – 16 Jan 2018

	Hunter New England (YTD* by year)					Central Coast (YTD* by year)				
	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014
<b>Cryptosporidiosis</b>	3	8	3	2	3	0	3	3	1	0
<b>Gonorrhoea</b>	6	6	2	4	2	9	5	5	6	7
<b>Syphilis</b>	1	2	3	1	0	0	3	0	2	1
<b>Chlamydial Infection</b>	49	37	56	49	22	30	54	55	35	52
<b>Influenza</b>	12	2	3	7	8	6	4	3	1	1
<b>Meningococcal Disease</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Pertussis</b>	12	19	40	16	10	3	5	50	1	4
<b>Ross River Virus</b>	1	11	2	4	4	0	1	0	7	1
<b>Salmonellosis</b>	6	13	7	13	15	9	38	7	13	8

\*YTD, Year to date for each year (reporting delays may result in changes to 2018 figures)

**Population Health contact details (note, 1300 066 055 will find your local PHU)**

Hunter New England: Wallsend Office 4924 6477 - Tamworth Office 6764 8000

Central Coast Public Health Unit: Gosford Office 4320 9730

This [Communicable Disease Report](#) and previous editions are available on the internet

Public Health contact [HNELHD-PHEnquiries@hnehealth.nsw.gov.au](mailto:HNELHD-PHEnquiries@hnehealth.nsw.gov.au)