

TROPICAL PUBLIC health news.

Tropical Public Health Service (Cairns)

Welcome

Welcome to the first newsletter from Tropical Public Health Services (Cairns) for health professionals and others interested in public health in Far North Queensland.

Produced quarterly, it includes public health news and updates including the oft-requested data table of notifiable conditions. This issue includes measles, influenza and a landmark court ruling on e-cigarettes.

We welcome your feedback and suggestions for future issues.

Regards,
Dr Richard Gair, Director

Introduction to TPHS Cairns

Tropical Public Health Services (Cairns) has a long history in responding to public health challenges in tropical, regional and remote environments.

Public health focuses on the health and wellbeing of populations, rather than of individuals. It aims to minimise the morbidity and mortality from communicable and vaccine-preventable diseases, and environmental health hazards thereby:



Immunisation and communicable disease staff handed out colourful showbags at NAIDOC week celebrations in Cairns recently.

- protecting the health of the population, and
- preventing disease and illness.

Communicable Disease Control and Immunisation

Tropical Public Health Services (Cairns) provides expert advice on the public health management of communicable diseases, including:

- Communicable disease surveillance and response to notifiable conditions including the management of outbreaks,
- Expert advice on immunisations and follow up of adverse events following immunisation (AEFI) and vaccine errors,
- Response to cold chain breaches and collation of cold chain breach audit reports.

Environmental Health

The Environmental Health section provides health protection services including regulatory compliance, disease outbreak investigation and response, risk assessment and mitigation of environmental health hazards and toxicants. It works closely with local governments and plays a key role in the management of natural disasters that impact public health, e.g. cyclones.

Medical Entomology

The Medical Entomology section provides advice and carries out surveillance, monitoring, and control of mosquitos that carry diseases such as dengue fever and malaria.



In this issue:

- + Measles
- + Flu Season Update
- + Notifiable conditions surveillance data

Rheumatic Heart Disease

The state-wide Rheumatic Heart Disease Register and Control Program is hosted in Cairns. The program provides support and advice to health service providers on the identification, diagnosis, treatment and management of acute rheumatic fever and rheumatic heart disease, as well as maintaining the state-wide client ARF and RHD register.

Sexual Health

A small sexual health team maintains the Syphilis Register for North Queensland, assists with syphilis surveillance and provides advice to health service providers as appropriate.

Health Surveillance (Epidemiology)

The Health Surveillance Unit provides data services essential to:

- communicable disease surveillance and outbreaks,
- identifying trends or patterns of disease or health issues.

Measles

There have been 51 cases of measles in Queensland this year and 6 cases in Far North Queensland (as of 12 August). Measles is not endemic in Australia but imported cases from overseas have caused secondary cases in unvaccinated locals.

Measles is a highly contagious viral illness that can cause severe complications including pneumonia and encephalitis.

Measles is characterised by:

- Fever,
- Rash, maculopapular usually commencing on the face,
- Cough, conjunctivitis, Coryza, and Koplik spots.

In May, a GP notified a possible case of measles to Tropical Public Health Services (Cairns). A child had presented with a three-day history of fever, cough and a rash which had developed that morning on the face and head. The family had travelled recently to PNG where there is a country-wide outbreak of measles.

The vaccination history of the child was uncertain so a throat swab for PCR testing was requested. A diagnosis of measles was confirmed.

The child had attended school, which resulted in 19 contacts without verified MMR vaccination. These children were excluded from attending school for 18 days to protect other students. Although the case attended a GP practice during his infectious period no secondary cases have been identified from the patients waiting at

the GP practice. The medical centre involved has a good policy in place for isolating any possible measles cases from the general waiting room.

Measles vaccination is:

- **Free of charge,**
- A scheduled vaccination for children,
- Recommended to anybody born during or after 1966 who has not already received two doses of MMR vaccination.

Please consider opportunistic vaccination of your patients who fit the above criteria, particularly for people who are about to travel overseas for work or holiday.

Public Health works to prevent secondary cases by identifying contacts. In this case, 19 school contacts were identified who were not vaccinated. The immediate notification on suspicion of measles means unprotected contacts (e.g. people in medical centre waiting rooms and schools) can be vaccinated early and protected from measles.

If you suspect a measles case, contact Tropical Public Health Services (Cairns) immediately on 4226 5555.

There has been a recent measles case in your community.

Are you aged between 4 and 48 and had your measles vaccines?

“No” or “not sure”, then you could be at risk of catching measles

Contact your GP or local Community Health Centre for your free vaccine



Note: It is recommended that all people born in or since 1966 have 2 doses Measles vaccines (given as MMR – measles mumps rubella). MMR is part of routine immunisation schedule at 12 months, 18 months and/or 4 years of age.

July 2014

E-Cigarettes in landmark court action

A year-long investigation by Tropical Public Health Services (Cairns) has led to a landmark court ruling in Cairns.

In mid-2013, Tropical Public Health Services (Cairns) received a complaint regarding the alleged advertisement and sale of e-cigarettes in Smithfield.



Environmental health officers seized about 30 millilitres of liquid nicotine. The liquid nicotine was so strong that 1 millilitre of the product contained four times the lethal dose for a child.

On July 10, a Queensland-first case for breaches of the *Health (Drugs and Poisons) Regulation 1996* was heard at the Cairns Magistrates Court.

The defendant entered a plea of guilty to two charges: the possession of liquid nicotine and advertising for sale a regulated poison - in this case liquid nicotine used in e-cigarettes. He was ordered to pay a fine of \$2500; no conviction was recorded.

Manager for Environmental Health, Brad Milligan said a huge amount of work had gone into compiling the case for prosecution.

“It is a great outcome to have achieved this result in what was a test case for a novel product that can present a significant health risk to users.

“Many of these products do not undergo any validation or health testing to ensure their safety. They

are marketed to children and young people and have caused significant injury and in some cases death, after ingestion.”

Liquid nicotine is extremely toxic and has been linked to serious injury and death. It is classified as a Schedule 7 poison.

In 2013, 17 cases of accidental ingestion of liquid nicotine products were reported to the Poisons Information Centre in Queensland. Of these, 11 were children between the ages of two and four.

Salmonella Outbreak

A cluster of Salmonella food poisoning cases occurred at a popular Port Douglas resort in January 2014. The timely

identification of the cases was due to the vigilance of a local GP and his staff which enabled Tropical Public Health Services (Cairns) officers to respond rapidly to investigate and control the outbreak.

The findings of the investigation indicated that there were three potential causes of food contamination: the use of raw eggs in prepared foods, an infected food handler, and cross contamination due to an undersized kitchen.

Ten people were diagnosed with Salmonella food poisoning that was linked to food prepared at the resort’s kitchen. However, the outbreak could have been significantly worse if not for the prompt notification by the GP.

Flu Update

Far North Queensland has had 381 confirmed cases of influenza this year (to 3 August) of which 46 required hospitalisation.

The 2014 annual flu programme is well underway and service providers are reminded that eligible groups for free funded vaccine are:

- All adults aged 65 years and over,
- Pregnant women,

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 15 years and over ,
- Individuals aged 6 months of age and over with medical conditions predisposing them to severe influenza (pg 252-254 in the Australian Immunisation Handbook, 10th edition).

NB: Children aged from 6 months to less than 5 years **MUST NOT** receive Fluvax®. See [QHIP program](#) advice for those children aged 5-10 years.

Queensland Influenza Summary	2014 Year to Date*	Recent Week (28 July - 3 August)
All Influenza Notifications	5,692	1,084
Influenza A†	4,961	982
A(H1N1)pdm09‡	1,107	29
A/H3N2	79	0
Subtype unavailable	3,775	953
Influenza B	731	102
Un-typed	0	0
Influenza Hospitalisations§	768 (ICU: 111)	150 (ICU: 16)

* Includes recent week

† Subtype counts/proportions may be subject to change as further lab. results become available

‡ World Health Organization (WHO) standard abbreviation for the influenza strain associated with the 2009 pandemic, also known as A/California/7/2009 (H1N1)

§ Queensland public hospitals only

Notifiable conditions reported in Far North Queensland:

TOTAL	Cairns & Hinterland	Torres Strait & Cape York	TOTAL
(1 January 2014 – 31 July 2014)			
Acute Rheumatic Fever	8	9	17
Barham Forest Virus	37	5	42
Campylobacter	249	6	255
Chlamydia (STI)	1162	433	1595
Cryptosporidiosis	32	<5	≈35
Dengue Fever	135	<5	≈140
Gonorrhoea (STI)	208	112	320
Hepatitis A (All)	0	0	0
Hepatitis B (All)	31	7	38
Hepatitis C	117	6	123
HIB	0	0	0
Influenza (Lab Confirmed)	314	62	376
Invasive Group A Streptococcal	0	0	0
Leptospirosis	44	0	44
Malaria (All)	<5	0	<5
Measles	6	0	6
Melioidosis	6	<5	≈10
Meningococcal Infection (Invasive)	<5	0	<5
Pertussis	68	16	84
Pneumococcal Disease (Invasive)	0	0	0
Q Fever	11	<5	12
Ross River Virus	136	13	149
Rotavirus	12	<5	13
Salmonella (All)	144	25	169
Shigella (All)	15	5	20
Varicella	202	21	223
Yersinia	27	<5	≈30
Zoster	<5	0	<5

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Useful web links:

- [Travel Vaccination advice for GPs](#)
- [Communicable Disease Control Guidance and Information](#)
- [Communicable Disease Control Manual, 5th Edition, June 2011](#)
- [Immunisation information for health professionals](#)
- [Queensland Sexual Health Clinical Management Guidelines 2010](#)
- [RHD and ARF guidelines](#)