Possible foodborne outbreak

During September the New South Wales Health Department received notification of 87 cases of gastrointestinal illness following a luncheon in Sydney. The illness was characterised by abdominal cramps and diarrhoea that lasted around 18 hours. Investigations are continuing into the source of the outbreak. Whilst it appears that the illness was self-limiting all attendees have been advised to observe good hygiene practices.

The Public Health Laboratory Network

As part of the implementation of the National Communicable Diseases Surveillance Strategy, the Public Health Laboratory Network (PHLN) has been established. The PHLN is a collaborative group of laboratories with expertise in public health microbiology. It will work in tandem with the Communicable Diseases Network Australia New Zealand.

The aim of the PHLN is to provide strategic advice, define priorities and share expertise at the national level in order to enhance the national capacity for the laboratory based surveillance of communicable diseases in Australia. Laboratories have been nominated by State and Territory health departments. Members of the PHLN are required to consult widely with others in their jurisdiction.

The inaugural meeting of the PHLN was held in June 1997. The network now meets by teleconference at 4-weekly intervals. Matters which the PHLN are currently considering include the funding of tests of public health importance, current infrastructure and turnaround times for tests of public health importance.

The PHLN is a network for all microbiologists involved in public health. Should you wish to bring a matter to the attention of the PHLN please contact one of the members listed below.

Chair: Professor Lyn Gilbert
Centre for Infectious Diseases and Microbiology Laboratory Services, Institute of Clinical Pathology and Medical Research, New South Wales, Ph: 02 9845 6252

Secretary: Ms Margaret Curran
Department of Health and Family Services, The Australian Capital Territory, Ph: 02 6289 7416

Professor Geoff Hogg
The Microbiological Diagnostic Unit Victoria, Ph: 02 9344 5701

Dr Mike Catton
The Victorian Infectious Diseases Reference Laboratory, Victoria, Ph: 03 9280 2656

Professor Chris Burrell, Dr Geoff Higgins
Institute of Medical and Veterinary Sciences, South Australia, Ph: 08 8303 5434

Dr Keith Ott
Royal Hobart Hospital, Tasmania, Ph: 03 6238 8416

Dr David Smith, Dr Tim Inglis
Pathcentre, Western Australia, Ph: 08 9346 3461

Dr Linda Selvey
Communicable Diseases Network Australia New Zealand, Ph: 07 3234 1152

Dr Gary Lum
Royal Darwin Hospital, The Northern Territory, Ph: 08 8922 8091

Professor Bill Rawlinson
Prince of Wales Hospital, South Eastern Area Laboratory Service, New South Wales Ph: 02 9382 9113

Ms Linda Halliday
The Canberra Hospital, The Australian Capital Territory, Ph: 02 6244 2550

Mr John Bates
Centre for Public Health Sciences, Queensland, Ph: 07 3274 9101

Dr Mike Rickard
The Australian Animal Health Laboratory, Victoria, Ph: 03 5227 5050

Dr Judith Miller
Institute of Environmental Science and Research Ltd New Zealand, Ph: 0011 64 4 237 0149