Welcome to the first Public Health Laboratory Network (PHLN) quarterly newsletter.

The aim of the PHLN is to provide strategic advice and share expertise at the national level in order to enhance the national capacity for the laboratory based detection and surveillance of agents and vectors of communicable diseases in Australia. This is achieved by the sharing of knowledge and expertise within the PHLN, consultation with other laboratories, organisations and individuals with specialised expertise and communication with other public and private pathology services in the jurisdictions. Secretariat support is provided by the Department of Health & Ageing (DoHA).

In May 2006, the PHLN formally became a sub-committee of the Australia Health Protection Committee (AHPC).

This newsletter will provide regular information about the PHLN; their activities and key achievements.

**PHLN’s Terms of Reference:**

1. Establish, maintain and expand collaborative links between pathology laboratories that have a public health focus (including veterinary pathology that has human impact).

2. Promote best practice in all disciplines of public health pathology practice.

3. Improve nationwide access to a comprehensive range of pathology and laboratory services for control of communicable diseases.

4. Work collaboratively with the Communicable Disease Network Australia (CDNA).

5. Provide strategic advice to the Australian Health Protection Committee (AHPC) to identify gaps and needs and ensure optimal use of existing pathology laboratory resources for communicable disease surveillance, and during outbreaks of national importance.

6. Build on the existing capacity of public health laboratories to respond to communicable disease outbreaks and newly emerging infectious diseases.

7. Respond to matters relating to public health microbiology, as referred by AHPC.

8. These TOR will be fulfilled to the best of our ability within resources available to support these activities.
Membership of PHLN:

Northern Territory
Dr Gary Lum, AM (Chair), Territory Health Services

Australian Capital Territory
Professor Peter Collignon, ACT Pathology

New South Wales
Dr Dominic Dwyer (Deputy Chair), Institute of Clinical Pathology and Medical Research (ICPMR)
Prof William Rawlinson, South East Area Laboratory Service (SEALS)
A/Prof John Tapsall, South East Area Laboratory Service (SEALS)
Professor Lyn Gilbert (Inaugural Chair), Institute of Clinical Pathology and Medical Research (ICPMR)
Dr Jan Lanser, New South Wales Public Health Unit Liaison Officer

Queensland
Dr Graeme Nimmo, Queensland Health Pathology Service (QHPS)
Mr John Bates, Queensland Health Scientific Services (QHSS)

South Australia
Dr Ivan Bastian, Institute of Medical and Veterinary Science (IMVS)
Dr Geoff Higgins, Institute of Medical and Veterinary Science (IMVS)

Tasmania
Dr Alistair McGregor, Royal Hobart Hospital

Victoria
Dr Geoff Hogg, Microbiological Diagnostic Unit Public Health Laboratory
Dr Mike Catton, Victorian Infectious Disease Reference Laboratory

Western Australia
Dr David Smith (Immediate Past Chair), PathWest Laboratory Medicine WA
Dr Tim Inglis, PathWest Laboratory Medicine WA

National
Dr Leslee Roberts, Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing
Dr Ann Koehler, Communicable Diseases Network Australia (CDNA)
Dr Gordon Abraham, CSIRO Australian Animal Health Laboratory (AAHL)

Expert
Dr Tony Della-Porta, BioSecurity and Biocontainment International Consultants
Dr Ian Barr, WHO Collaborating Centre for Reference and Research on Influenza

Observers
Dr Fiona Thomson–Carter, Institute of Environmental Science and Research Ltd
Dr Lance Jennings, Canterbury Health Laboratories
Dr Michael Leung, Australian Association of Pathology Practices

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**Recent Publications:**
The PHLN have produced the following publications:
- Guidelines for the use and interpretation of nucleic acid detection tests for *Neisseria gonorrhoeae* in Australia, December 2005.
- Laboratory precautions for samples collected from patients with suspected viral haemorrhagic fevers, September 2005.

The PHLN has developed Laboratory Case Definitions (LCD) for the diagnosis of diseases which are notifiable in Australia. The case definitions are updated when new information is available.

The following LCDs have been published:
- Alphavirus and flavivirus
- Australian bat lyssavirus infection
- Brucellosis
- *Campylobacter*
- Cholera
- Cryptosporidiosis
- Diarrhoea caused by rotavirus
- Gonorrhoea
- Influenza
- Invasive meningococcal disease
- *Legionella*
- *Listeria*
- Measles
- Melioidosis
- Norwalk virus
- Parainfluenza
- Pneumococcal disease (invasive)
- Poliovirus
- Q fever
- Respiratory syncytial virus
- Salmonella
- Shiga-like Toxigenic *Escherichia coli*
- Shigellosis
- Tetanus
- Tuberculosis

All of the above publications are available on the website at [www.health.gov.au/phln](http://www.health.gov.au/phln)

**Exercise Cumpston**, a national pandemic influenza exercise, was held from 16-19 October, 2006. The scenario was an evolving situation overseas, leading into the appearance of a novel pandemic strain in Australia. PHLN were participants in the exercise.

The PHLN held their annual face-to-face meeting on the 26 and 27 October 2006. The meeting was very successful and productive. The meeting covered:
- A session on Laboratory Safety which included discussions on: antiviral prophylaxis for laboratory staff, the Australian Management Plan for Pandemic Influenza (AHPMMI) antiviral policy and an overview of The Office of the Gene Technology Regulator (OGTR) and the Australian Quarantine Inspection Service (AQIS) laboratory standards.
- A comprehensive debrief on Exercise Cumpston 2006.
- Laboratory Case Definitions (LCDs), including: PHLN custodians, authors, endorsement processes and priority LCDs.
- Overview from DoHA on:
  - The direction of AHPC
  - The Office of Health Protection (OHP)
  - Strengthening laboratory capacity
- Strategic direction of PHLN for 2007.
- Queensland Health Pathology Services (QHPS) provided members with an overview of the Antimicrobial Resistance Surveillance System.

**Upcoming Meetings**
- 18 December 2006
- 29 January 2007
- 26 February 2007
- 26 March 2007

We would welcome feedback and comments on this newsletter to: phln@health.gov.au or PHLN Secretariat MDP 14 GPO Box 9848 CANBERRA ACT 2601