

# Medical Officer of Health Environmental Health ADVICE

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## **Introduction**

This edition of Environmental Health Advice focuses on safe and healthy summer holidays. We provide advice on how to reduce health risks through safer barbecues, safer and healthier gardening, sun safety, safer swimming and safer collection of shellfish.

Public Health Protection has undertaken a risk assessment for the intended painted apple moth eradication programme, to be conducted in West Auckland by the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry. A summary is presented here for your information.

## **Tips for a safer summer**

### **Safer Swimming**

#### *Bathing Beaches*

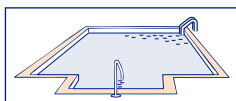
Public Health Protection advises that swimmers should not swim near stormwater drains or at bathing beaches for the 48-hour period after a significant rainfall e.g. more than 10 mm of rainfall. This period should be extended to 72 hours for muddy/silty tidal zones and areas which are not directly open to the sea. e.g. Manukau Harbour, Waitemata Harbour.

Beach water quality is monitored over summer at 50 beaches in the Auckland region. The beaches are tested regularly to ensure that they meet national health guidelines. This is a joint project between Auckland City, North Shore City and Rodney District Council. The information is updated weekly and is available 24 hours a day by calling 0800 SAFESWIM (0800 72 33 79).



#### *Cryptosporidiosis and Swimming Pools*

Outbreaks of cryptosporidiosis have been associated with swimming pools overseas and in New Zealand, where in 1998 there was an outbreak linked to a Lower Hutt swimming pool. Pools can become contaminated with cryptosporidium cysts if swimmers enter the water within two weeks of having had diarrhoea, or if there is a faecal accident in the pool (bowel motion in the water). Unfortunately cryptosporidium cysts are very resistant to disinfection by chlorine, which is the most common chemical used to disinfect pool water. A fine pool filter can remove cysts, however, this may take some hours or days after a contamination event such as a faecal accident.



Cryptosporidiosis is a common parasitic infection in New Zealand. It usually causes diarrhoea (loose bowel motions), stomach cramps and possibly vomiting. However some people who have the infection may have no symptoms at all. There is no treatment for cryptosporidiosis, and it usually goes away within 2 to 4 weeks. However, in people who are immunocompromised (have weakened immune systems for fighting infections), such as people who are HIV positive or having cancer treatment, cryptosporidiosis can be life threatening.

The best way to control cryptosporidiosis linked to swimming pool use is to keep swimmers out of the water if they have had diarrhoea within the previous two weeks. In addition pool operators need to follow guidelines on how to minimise the risk of water contamination, including the appropriate actions to take when faecal accidents occur. If people remain in the water after a faecal accident or an accident goes undetected cryptosporidiosis can be transmitted to anyone in the vicinity who puts their head under water. Regular sampling of pool water for cryptosporidium cysts has only a limited role in investigations at present as the tests available are expensive, time-consuming and do not show whether any cysts found are infectious or not. However regular monitoring of pool water quality (microbiological indicator testing) and chlorine levels is recommended to prevent other water-borne illnesses.

Key points in the prevention of cryptosporidiosis

- ✓ Practice good personal hygiene always: wash and dry hands thoroughly after going to the toilet, before eating, before cooking or handling food, after handling pets or farm animals, after blowing the nose. Make sure children do the same - supervise and help them.
- ✓ Children should always swim in tight fitting togs or swim pants, not nappies. However, togs will not actually stop micro-organisms from getting into the water if the child has an accident. To decrease the chance of accidents happening in the pool, make sure they go to the toilet just before swimming, and at regular intervals while at the pool - remind and supervise them.
- ✓ If at all possible, shower yourself and your children before putting on your togs. Use soap and warm water, especially in the anal area (bottom).
- ✓ If you become aware of a faecal accident in the pool, get out of the pool (and get children out) and tell the pool staff immediately. Don't get back into the water until the pool staff say you can.

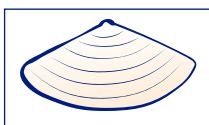
#### **For further information:**

- ▶ please ask for the Duty Environmental Health Protection Officer, phone (09) 262 1855

## Safer Collection of Shellfish

People are familiar with toxic algal blooms making shellfish unsafe to eat. However pollution from other sources can also make shellfish unsafe. The Ministry of Health recommends that you do not gather shellfish from shellfish beds around sewer outfalls and stormwater drains. Both raw and treated sewage may contain viruses, which have very low infective doses. Stormwater contains a variety of substances, which may contaminate shellfish making them unsafe to eat. Public Health Protection does not recommend collecting shellfish from city beaches.

Scallops should always have the gut and skirt removed before eating, even when collected from an area where warnings have not been issued. Eat only the white muscle and pink roe portions.



## Safer Barbecues

Food-borne illness is caused by bacteria, which are able to multiply very fast in moist, warm conditions where they have a suitable food source. The following recommendations will help to reduce cases of food borne illnesses:



- ▶ Handle food with clean hands. (Hands should be thoroughly dried after washing)
- ▶ Wash knives and utensils, and scrub chopping boards between preparation of raw and cooked foods.
- ▶ Defrost frozen foods in the fridge before cooking.
- ▶ Cool hot foods, covered for no more than 30 minutes before refrigerating
- ▶ Reheat leftovers until steaming hot throughout. Do not reheat more than once.
- ▶ Chicken, meat patties and sausages need to be thoroughly cooked.
- ▶ Cover foods before storing in the cupboard or fridge.
- ▶ Store raw and cooked foods separately.
- ▶ Put a frozen chilli pad with barbecue and picnic foods to keep food safe.
- ▶ Further information on food safety is available online [www.foodworks.co.nz/foodsafes](http://www.foodworks.co.nz/foodsafes).
- ▶ Barbecue enthusiasts are also reminded not to use treated or painted timber as firewood. Treated and painted wood may release chemicals when heated that are hazardous to health.

### For further information:

- ▶ on food safety please contact the Duty Environmental Health Protection Officer, phone (09) 262 1855

## Safer and Healthier Gardening

Gardening is a popular leisure activity in New Zealand. The following advice is designed to help gardeners avoid risks associated with gardening.



### Organisms in garden soil

Diseases including tetanus and legionnaires disease can be caused by exposure to micro-organisms in soil. The following measures will reduce potential exposures.

- ▶ Minimise the amount of dust when working in the garden.
- ▶ Water your garden and indoor plants using a gentle water spray.
- ▶ Dampen potting mixes before use.
- ▶ Open bags of soil products slowly away from the face.
- ▶ Wash hands thoroughly after gardening.

- ▶ Make sure that the working area (glasshouse or potting shed) is well ventilated.
- ▶ Keep cuts, scratches and grazes covered while working in the garden. Immediately clean any injuries.
- ▶ Keep your tetanus immunisation current.

### Garden Chemicals

The unsafe use and storage of garden chemicals can accidentally poison people. Public Health Protection recommends that you undertake the following precautions:

- ▶ Purchase only the quantities you need and avoid storing large quantities or mixtures of chemicals. Store incompatible chemicals separately. To avoid fires and adverse chemical reactions keep oxidising agents such as nitrate fertilisers and chlorine-based swimming pool materials from flammable materials such as methylated spirits and kerosene.
- ▶ Make sure that chemicals are properly labelled and stored in their original containers. Keep well out of the reach of children and away from food.
- ▶ Follow the mixing and application instructions on the label. Wear protective clothing when advised on the label and use any other necessary protective equipment.
- ▶ Apply the spray when the air is still to avoid the chances of spray damage to other areas of the garden or neighbouring properties.
- ▶ Ask your local authority about the safest way to dispose of unused chemicals. Do not dispose of them in inorganic rubbish collections or routine household rubbish collections.

### Poisonous plants

It is not always easy to identify which plants are poisonous. Many common garden plants are poisonous and able to cause a variety of reactions from mild skin irritation to a severe or even fatal response. Young children are most at risk.

- ▶ Children should be taught not to sample or play with leaves, berries, bulbs or flowers.
- ▶ Tell children to spit out any plant that "burns" their mouth and get help straight away. If you can, take a piece of the plant with you for identification purposes.
- ▶ Store bulbs and seeds out of sight and out of reach of young children.

### Insect Stings and Bites

- ▶ Avoid wearing highly perfumed products in the garden. Cover yourself with appropriate clothing, including footwear and gloves.
- ▶ If there is a severe reaction to the sting such as a rash, extreme swelling or difficulty with breathing see a doctor immediately or call for an ambulance.

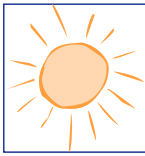
### Garden Machinery

Every summer, people are at risk from injuries caused by garden machinery. The following precautions will reduce injuries.

- ▶ Keep your machinery in good repair and pay particular attention to engine covers and exhaust systems. Make sure any guards provided for the blade are fitted correctly.
- ▶ Before you start, clear the working area (lawn, fences line, footpaths etc.) of stones or other objects which may be thrown by the machinery.
- ▶ Wear protective equipment when using machinery (eg an adequate grade of earmuffs or plugs, goggles and solid footwear).
- ▶ Make sure that you have an isolating transformer for electrical garden equipment.
- ▶ Make sure that you are familiar with the operation and safety requirements of any hired or borrowed equipment.

## Sunsmart Behaviour

- ▶ Wear loose comfortable clothing that gives good coverage.
- ▶ Wear a hat that will shade your face, neck and ears, and wear sunglasses.
- ▶ Apply a sunscreen which is SPF 15 or greater and is also broad-spectrum, 15 to 30 minutes before going in the sun, and reapply every two hours. (Store sunscreens at



a temperature less than 25 degrees C). Keep an eye on the time. New Zealand sun is especially fierce between 11 a.m. and 4 p.m. This is when the harmful UV rays are at their strongest.

- ▶ Invest in a sun umbrella for instant portable shade.
- ▶ Make the most of the shade.
- ▶ Show your doctor any moles or coloured skin lesions that grow or change in size, shape or colour.

# Health Risk Assessment for the painted apple moth eradication programme

A health risk assessment has been undertaken by Auckland District Health Board's Public Health Protection Office for the intended painted apple moth eradication programme, to be conducted in West Auckland by the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry. The programme includes targeted spraying of Foray 48B from BK 117 heli-copters in the riparian areas of Mcleod Creek, the Whau River and Wairau Creek. It also includes spraying of Traherne Island and some parts of Waikumete Cemetery. Some parts of Parris Park may be included later in the spray programme. The suburbs involved are Te Atatu South, Glendene, Kelston, Glen Eden and the Avondale Peninsula. Spraying is due to start early December, and occur every three weeks for a maximum of 15 sprays.

Foray 48B has been used around the world for 35 years. Bacillus thuringiensis kurstaki (Btk) is the active ingredient.

Btk produces protein crystals that are toxic to caterpillars upon ingestion. Btk has never been implicated in human infection and the protein crystals it produces are harmless to humans. Included in Foray 48B are acid regulators, sticking agents and preservatives. The names of these ingredients are a commercial secret and hence are not available for release to the general public. They however are commonly used in pharmaceutical and cosmetic products and are used as food additives. Some of the components have been noted to cause skin irritation and allergy when used in the above products. The level of exposure expected from the spray programme is not expected to cause these effects though people may attribute them to the spray.

The painted apple moth caterpillar has tussock like hairs and its cocoon has these hairs incorporated into its structure. The hairs can cause urticaria (hives), eye and respiratory tract irritation.

Though no significant health effects are expected from the spray programme the Public Health Protection Office advocates a precautionary approach.

The main recommendations are:

- ▶ Asthma patients are advised to follow an up to date management plan as per usual and if practical avoid being outdoors while spraying is in progress.
- ▶ People with skin disease are advised to have a current supply of their regular topical medication. The spray is water-soluble and can be washed off skin easily.
- ▶ Schools should continue as per normal except classes outdoors should be relocated indoors if possible when spraying is known to be occurring
- ▶ Normal food and personal hygiene rules should be practised
- ▶ Normal pool maintenance practices should be observed
- ▶ Anyone collecting roof water for consumption should contact the public health protection office for individually tailored advice.

- ▶ Contact with the painted apple moth caterpillar and cocoon should be avoided.
- ▶ Asthma patients and other people who wish to take a precautionary approach could observe the following recommendations:
- ▶ During the spray period, close windows and doors and place newspaper over any open fireplace.
- ▶ Stay indoors for 2 hours after the spraying has finished. After this time open doors and windows and go outside as you normally would.

### For further information:

- ▶ please ask for the Duty Environmental Health Protection Officer, phone (09) 262 1855

## Short Notes

### ▶ Mosquitoes

This summer Public Health Protection is continuing with its surveillance of potential exotic mosquito breeding habitats. Public Health Protection is currently identifying and mapping potential habitats for the southern salt marsh mosquito throughout the Auckland region.



### ▶ House renovations

Homeowners renovating houses are reminded of the hazards involved with the removal of lead paint and asbestos. The Ministry of Health advises that you use contractors certified to perform restricted work with asbestos. A leaflet Repainting Lead-based paint is available from Public Health Protection.



### Dr David Sinclair

Dr David Sinclair has recently joined the environmental health team as a public health medicine specialist. David has most recently been working with the Ministry of Health in the area of immunisation. He has previously worked in Hamilton as a Medical Officer of Health and for Te Puni Kokiri as a health policy advisor.