

# Medical Officer of Health Environmental Health ADVICE

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## Introduction

Swimming is a fun summer activity. In this edition we discuss the steps you can take to make sure that swimming is fun and healthy.

The Environmental Health team is funded by the Ministry of Health to undertake work to prevent the establishment of exotic mosquitoes in the Auckland region. During December 2004, we undertook two educational campaigns to raise awareness of exotic mosquitoes.

## Recreational water quality

Water at beaches, rivers and lakes can become contaminated with disease causing micro-organisms through sewage discharges, overflows from sewage networks (both dry and wet weather events), stormwater, and runoff from farms. In some parts of the Auckland region, sewage discharges from boats may also impact on recreational water quality. A variety of illnesses including diarrhoea, skin, ear, eye and upper respiratory infections can be caused by swimming and playing in contaminated water.

Recreational water quality at popular bathing beaches is monitored by district councils in the Auckland region. Auckland City, Manukau City, North Shore City, Rodney District and Waitakere City undertake weekly monitoring from October to April. The Franklin District has a limited beach water quality monitoring programme and no monitoring is undertaken by Papakura District Council as the district does not have any bathing beaches. The sampling locations for bathing water quality are shown in figure one. Recreational water quality is monitored for microbiological contaminants using bacteria which are indicators of faecal contamination. The water quality results are compared to Ministry for the Environment guidelines for recreational water quality and during summer, the current beach water quality results are available from the council websites. The results for Auckland City, North Shore and Rodney beaches are also available from 0800 safeswim (0800 723 379). Rodney District, North Shore City and Waitakere City also monitor recreational water quality at selected freshwater sites.

In June 2003, the Ministry for the Environment and the Ministry of Health produced new guidelines for assessing the public health risk of recreational waters. The *Microbiological*

### Water Quality Guidelines for Marine and Freshwater Recreational Areas

incorporate "a risk grading for the catchment supported by the direct measurement of appropriate faecal indicators to assess the suitability of a site for recreation". The Auckland Regional Council, district councils and the Auckland Regional Public Health Service are cooperating to implement these guidelines within the Auckland region.

Poor water quality in community and school swimming pools can also cause outbreaks of waterborne illness. In 2003, there were 2 outbreaks with 73 cases of infectious disease linked to swimming/spa pools (ESR, 2004) and in 2001 there was a large outbreak of cryptosporidiosis linked to several public swimming pools in the Auckland region. Public swimming and spa pools should be monitored and maintained in accordance with the New Zealand Pool Water Quality Standard: NZS 5826 2000. Spa pool filters also need to be regularly maintained and the water in domestic spa pools should be changed monthly.

Care needs to be taken when swimming in geothermal pools e.g. around Rotorua and Taupo. *Naegleria fowleri* is a tiny organism which can live in unchlorinated geothermal pools and causes amoebic meningitis. Amoebic meningitis is a serious illness and is usually fatal. It is caused by the organism being picked up through the nose when a person puts their head under water. More information on amoebic meningitis is available from the Ministry of Health brochure *Keep your head above water*. Copies of this brochure are available from the HealthEd website [www.healthed.govt.nz](http://www.healthed.govt.nz).



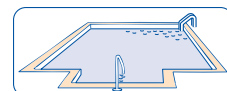
## Safe swimming tips

### Beaches, rivers and lakes

- ▶ Check the current beach water quality results by phoning 0800 SAFESWIM.
- ▶ Do not swim for 48 hours after heavy rain
- ▶ Do not allow children to play or swim in stormwater drains or near sewage outfalls

### Swimming pools and spa pools

- ▶ If you have had diarrhoea (an upset tummy) in the last two weeks –don't go swimming
- ▶ If your child has had diarrhoea in the last two weeks - do not let them go into the water



- ▶ Please go to the toilet and wash your hands with soap and water (preferably warm) before you enter the water
- ▶ Where possible, shower yourself and your children before entering the water, washing thoroughly using soap and warm water (especially in the area around your bottom)
- ▶ If there are no showers available at your school, children should be asked to shower in the morning at home using soap and warm water
- ▶ Babies should wear firm-fitting togs in the pool, not ordinary nappies. Always wash your hands after changing a nappy.
- ▶ Spa pools and swimming pools should be appropriately fenced with childproof fencing as required by the Fencing

- of Swimming Pools Act 1987 and local council by-laws.
- ▶ Never drink pool water.
- ▶ Make sure young children make frequent trips to the toilet to avoid accidents.
- ▶ If you think someone has had an accident in the water (e.g. you see poo in the pool) and quickly tell the person in charge.

#### Geothermal Pools

- ▶ Keep your head above water if swimming in a geothermal pool. Do not put your head under the water for any reason. Never jump, splash, dive or duck in the pool as this can force water up your nose.

## Mosquito update

The establishment of exotic mosquitoes, other insects of human health significance, spiders and imported rats in the Auckland region poses ongoing risks to public health. The Auckland region has 1500 kilometres of coastline, three sea ports, one major international airport, a military airport, a naval base and sugar company wharves, all of which are potential points of entry for insect and animal pests of public health significance. Cargo can also be opened and inspected at transitional facilities located throughout the Auckland region. There are 4000 importers in the Auckland region. Private yachts and marinas are also risk areas for imported pests.

During December 2004, the Environmental health team was involved with two education campaigns to raise awareness of exotic mosquitoes in the Auckland region.

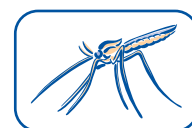
### Auckland International Airport mosquito project

Over December 2004, the environmental health team undertook a campaign at Auckland International Airport to raise awareness of the risks of the establishment of exotic mosquitoes in New Zealand. This project was overseen by John Whitmore, a health protection officer in the Environmental Health team. Mosquitoes can carry dangerous diseases that are not currently contracted in New Zealand. This programme focussed on the people that work in the vicinity of Auckland International Airport. Unwanted mosquitoes can enter New Zealand via incoming planes and cargo and action undertaken by members of the airport community can reduce the possibility that unwanted mosquitoes are able to establish in the vicinity.

### Miranda Mosquito Project

Over the Christmas holidays from December 04 to January 05, there was a joint ARPHS and Health Waikato health promotion display at the Miranda Bird Centre. The objective of the joint project was to raise awareness of the Southern Salt Marsh mosquito that has established in salt water marshes in other parts of the Auckland region. This mosquito is a known to carry Ross River virus in Australia. The salt marshes in Miranda have been identified as potential areas where this insect could establish and breed. In recent years, there has been regular surveillance monitoring for the Southern Salt marsh mosquito throughout the Auckland region. To date there have been no findings of any exotic mosquito species at Miranda. The Miranda project was overseen by Abnesh Chetty, a health protection officer in the Environmental Health team.

### What can I do to help prevent the establishment of exotic mosquitoes?



- ▶ Get rid of all tins, jars, bottles, plastic bags or other rubbish that can lie around outside and hold water
- ▶ Ensure that equipment and materials do not accumulate water
- ▶ Fill or drain hollows in the ground that can hold water
- ▶ Get rid of tyres and drill holes in the bottom of tyre swings. Tyres installed as buffers are a particular problem
- ▶ Check that gutters and drains are clear of leaves and blockages
- ▶ Where practical, overturn anything stored outside that could hold water
- ▶ Cover vent pipes in septic tanks with fly screen material
- ▶ Cover inlet pipes and overflow pipes on water storage tanks with fly screen material
- ▶ Stock ponds with fish that eat mosquito larvae. For information on the best species to use refer to the Department of Conservation pamphlet "*Is that a pest in my pond?*" (available from: [www.doc.govt.nz/pdfs/fish.pdf](http://www.doc.govt.nz/pdfs/fish.pdf))

#### Every week:

- ▶ Empty and clean pot plant saucers (or fill them with sand)
- ▶ Some pot plants hold water in their leaves - check regularly
- ▶ Empty and clean animal and pet drinking water containers
- ▶ Keep swimming pools well chlorinated and filtered, and free of dead leaves
- ▶ Empty paddling pools

#### Avoid being bitten by:

- ▶ Using insect repellent when outside during summer
- ▶ Putting screens on windows and doors
- ▶ Wearing long trousers, long-sleeved shirts and enclosed shoes if mosquitoes are active

# How the changes to the Smoke-free Environments Act will better protect young people

It is well-known that smoking endangers health, and it is now recognised that secondhand smoke is also a significant health risk. Secondhand smoke is released into the environment by people smoking cigarettes, cigars and pipes. From 1 January 2004, changes to the Smoke-free Environments Act 1990 extended protection for young people, workers and the public against exposure to secondhand smoke. One of the main aims of the law is to discourage young people from smoking by:

- ▶ preventing people, particularly young people, from being exposed to the harmful effects of other people's smoking ("secondhand smoke"); and
- ▶ controlling the sale of tobacco products.

These changes mean that all schools, kura kaupapa, early childhood education centres and kohanga reo must be 100 percent smokefree, inside and outside, grounds and buildings, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Signs that say "Smokefree at all times" must be placed at entrances to every building and at all entrances to the school or early childhood education centre. Not only will these requirements prevent young people from being exposed to secondhand smoke, but it is also hoped that it will be less likely that students will be influenced by the sight of adults smoking. The Smoke-free Environments Act also applies to volunteers working in indoor workplaces.

The management of the school or centre is required to take 'all reasonably practicable steps' to ensure that no one smokes on the site of the school or centre at any time, on any day. Management is also required to take all reasonably practicable steps to ensure that signs stating that smoking is forbidden at all times are placed at every entrance to the site and buildings.

Other public places where young people may be present should also be smokefree. The Smoke-free Environments

Act now requires all internal areas of work-places, licensed premises, restaurants and some other public areas to become Smokefree. Smoking will only be legally permitted in open (outdoor) areas, although proprietors may choose to ban smoking in these areas as well. Those in charge of the premises must take *all reasonably practicable steps* to stop anyone from smoking anywhere inside the workplace or venue.



In order to discourage young people from smoking, the Smoke-free Environments Act makes it illegal to sell or supply tobacco products and toy tobacco products to anyone under 18 years of age. Retailers are required to have a sign that tells the public this, and a sign that says that "SMOKING KILLS". Tobacco products cannot be displayed within one metre of products marketed primarily for children (such as confectionary, ice-cream, soft drinks or similar) and must not be displayed on shop counters or be visible from outside of the shop. Retailers must also limit the amount of tobacco products for sale, (maximum of 100 packages and 40 cartons displayed at a time, 2 per type).

For further information, contact the Smokefree Officers at Auckland Regional Public Health Service, phone 09-262 1855 or the Ministry of Health Information Line 0508 766 533.

Websites: [www.smokefreelaw.co.nz](http://www.smokefreelaw.co.nz), [www.arphs.govt.nz](http://www.arphs.govt.nz)

Detailed information on the smokefree law changes can be accessed from [www.smokefreelaw.co.nz](http://www.smokefreelaw.co.nz). Pamphlets can either be downloaded from this site and resources including pamphlets, signs and stickers can be ordered from the Auckland Regional Public Health Service by calling 09 262 1855.

## Short Notes

### ▶ MAF 0800 Emergency Pest and Disease hotline

The Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF) has a 24 hour a day Disease and Pest emergency hotline (0800 809 966). This is the number to call if you find an exotic insect or animal on recently imported goods or you suspect that an animal or plant has a new or exotic disease or pest.

### ▶ Web-based information for early childhood education centres

From March 2005, all ARPHS recommendations for early childhood education centres will be available from our website. [www.arphs.govt.nz](http://www.arphs.govt.nz)

Topics include model policies, recommended best practice and advice for the design and construction of suitable premises. Please feel free to contact either Megan Owen or Brian Johnson if you require further information or clarification.

## Shaun Yu



Shaun joined the Environmental Health team in June 2004 as a technical officer. He holds an MSc from the School of Environmental & Marine Sciences at the University of Auckland. Shaun previously worked for the National Institute of Water & Atmospheric Research Limited (NIWA) and the Watercare Laboratory Services Limited in Auckland and has 12 years research and teaching experience in China. Shaun provides ongoing technical support to the Environmental Health team and his main work areas include exotic mosquito surveillance and drinking water sampling.