

# Medical Officer of Health Environmental Health ADVICE

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## **Introduction**

Health Impacts Assessments or HIAs can be a useful tool to investigate health impacts (negative and positive) associated with implementing policy. Auckland Regional Public Health Service has commissioned a Health Impact Assessment (HIA) to consider the public health implications of implementing the Auckland City: Growth Management Strategy and the Liveable Communities Strategy. The Health Impact Assessment (HIA) is a joint collaboration between ARPHS and the Auckland City Council and this is the first time such a project has been undertaken in New Zealand. Shellfish are enjoyed by many New Zealanders. In this edition we outline how to safely collect, store and cook shellfish.

## **Auckland Regional Public Health Service is moving**

From the week of the 21st of March 2005 the Auckland Regional Public Health Service will be located in the Cornwall Complex (formerly National Womens). We will be located on floors 2 and 3 with the Resource Centre in the Main Foyer, ground floor.

▶ Our new street address will be:

Cornwall Complex  
Floor 2  
Building 15  
Greenlane Clinical Centre  
Auckland

▶ The postal address will remain the same:

Private Bag 92 605  
Symonds St  
Auckland

▶ The fax numbers will also remain the same;

Environmental Health	623 4645
General	630 7431
Imported Foods	261 1626

The Owens Road Resource Centre will be closed from February 16th and will reopen on April 14th in the Main Foyer on the ground floor of the Cornwall complex.

**Our 24 hour phone line will change to 09 623 4600**

## **Health Impact Assessments**

Auckland's population is expected to reach 2 million by the year 2050. Such growth places pressures on the health and well being of communities, existing services and the natural and physical environment. To facilitate growth in a sustainable manner the Regional and Local Councils have developed and adopted the Auckland Regional Growth Strategy. The strategy provides a vision for Auckland and how it could look in 50 years times with a population of two million. As part of the strategy, land has been released for development in Orewa, Albany, Greenhithe Long Bay, Takanini and Hingaia. Improvements are underway to the motorway network to ease the current congestion problems. The strategy is explicit in that Auckland cannot keep expanding outwards to accommodate growth as this has lead to sprawl,

consumption of fertile soils for farming and agricultural purposes and encroachment on the coastal margin which need protection.

The strategy also promotes comprehensive development and redevelopment around selected town centres and the main transport routes. Auckland City's approach to supporting and achieving the objectives of the Auckland Regional Growth Strategy is through the Auckland City: Growth Management Strategy and the implementation of the Liveable Communities Strategy. The ARPHS Environmental Health Team has commissioned a Health Impact Assessment (HIA) to consider the public health implication of implementing such a policy.

The Health Impact Assessment HIA is a joint collaboration between ARPHS and the Auckland City Council. The HIA

assessment is focused particularly on redevelopment and development within the Avondale Area including town centre re-development and residential intensification. ARPHS has commissioned Robert Quigley from Q Research and Assessment Ltd to undertake the HIA. Rob has an extensive background in the development of HIA's working with the NHS in England and the World Health Organisation in Geneva.

### *Why has the Auckland Public Health Service become involved in such an area?*

The ARPHS strategic plan identified sustainable development as a key area in delivering health improvements. By working more closely with Council staff at all levels better health outcomes can be achieved for all Aucklanders. It is becoming evident that there are strong links between the health of communities and the built environment. Levels of obesity, chronic illnesses, accidents involving motor vehicles and mental health are being influenced by the design of the built environment. The HIA will investigate the possible health implications both positive and negative of town centre redevelopment and the policy of residential intensification for the Avondale area.

### *What is a health impact assessment (HIA)?*

HIAs are a multidisciplinary approach investigating potential health outcomes of a proposal or policy. The aim of the HIA is to deliver evidence based recommendations informing the decision makers to maximise health gains and reduce or remove impacts of inequalities. Typical stages within an HIA include:

- ▶ Identifying if an HIA should occur
- ▶ Deciding what to do and how to do it
- ▶ Identifying health hazards and considering evidence of impacts
- ▶ Developing recommendations to reduce hazards and improve health
- ▶ Evaluating whether the HIA influenced the decision making process.

### *Focus of the HIA*

The focus of the HIA is the possible health implications from implementing the objectives and policies adopted from the Regional Growth Strategy and the Auckland City: Growth Management Strategy. What improvements can be made to the existing policy to maximise health gains through the implementation of the Liveable Communities Strategy. The HIA will investigate the implementation of the Liveable Communities Strategy for the Avondale Area. The Avondale Township and surrounding area has been identified by Auckland City Council as an area that can support increased growth and is appropriately referred to as an Area of Change. The Liveable Community Strategy focus is on planning with communities for change and growth in their local area in particular, increasing the amount of people living in the Avondale area, improving transport and connectivity, improving the social and community environment, improving the physical environment and strengthening the economy, these focus

areas are all considered to be important determinants of health.

### *Intensification within the Avondale Area*

Increasing the number of people living in the area is an attempt to reduce urban sprawl. Urban sprawl tends to separate housing, work school, shopping and services making car transport essential which in turn increases air pollution accidents, but also contributes to social isolation and obesity leaving people such as children, elderly the poor with limited access to community services and employment.

### *Improving Transport and Connectivity*

The Liveable Communities Strategy for Avondale proposes to integrate transport such as buses and rail, improve the capacity and efficiency of the existing road corridor, implement walking and cycling strategies and improve to the streetscape to ensure routes are safe for cyclist and pedestrians a like. Cycling and walking also have a net health gain by promoting physical activity in daily life. The transport initiatives proposed are to enable a more safe and efficient means of movement for pedestrians, cyclists and motorists residing in the area.

### *Improvements to the Social and Community Environment.*

Promoting and expanding community facilities within the town centre promotes social contact and provide easy access for disadvantaged sections of the community (elderly, sick young poor and disabled) to social services and health facilities.

### *Improvement to the living environments.*

With an expected increase in population numbers and land being consumed for development greater pressure is being placed on the use of existing public open spaces. Identifying and setting aside land for recreational needs to be a priority. Public open spaces can be focal point for communities staging community festivals thus improving social interaction and also being places for both passive and active recreation. Public open spaces can improve the mental and physical well being of a community. Many public places are now being designed taking into account safety features for instance better lighting and improved surveillance to encourage greater patronage.

### *Strengthening the Economy*

Ensuring the township can provide employment can improve social and capital equity for the locality. Through employment generation wealth can be achieved allowing a better quality of life through better access to a higher standard of housing stock and easier access to health and local community facilities.

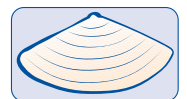
### *What public health gains can be achieved from HIA's?*

The scope for improving the health of communities rests to a large part outside the health sector - where the policies plans and developments that fundamentally underpin health and health determinants are decided. More healthy conscious developments policies, plans and projects would greatly enhance the health of populations.

## Shellfish

Auckland Regional Public Health Service oversees the monitoring of commercial shellfish in the Auckland region. Shellfish are filter feeders and are able to accumulate contaminants (e.g. chemicals and disease causing micro-organisms) from water. Many of these contaminants are not destroyed by cooking e.g. toxic algae and chemical contaminants. A range of illnesses can be associated with eating shellfish, including mild gastro enteritis, severe bacterial

Illness and hepatitis. Sources of microbial contamination of shellfish include septic tank discharges, runoff from farmland after heavy rain and effluent discharges from boats. Stormwater and industrial discharges can also be a source of microbiological and chemical contamination.



Shellfish can also become unsafe to eat if they are contaminated with marine biotoxins from toxic algal blooms.

Some algae produce marine biotoxins or chemicals which can cause severe illness and in extreme cases death inhumans. These marine biotoxins are not destroyed by cooking. The biotoxins can also accumulate in the guts of fish which eat algae. The main types of toxic shellfish poisoning include Paralytic Shellfish Poisoning, Amnesic Shellfish Poisoning, Diarrhetic Shellfish Poison and Neurotoxic Shellfish Poison. Data compiled by the Institute of Environmental Science and Research shows that there have been 20 notified cases of toxic shellfish poisoning in NZ since 1997.

Commercial shellfish quality is monitored to ensure that the shellfish are safe for human consumption. Regular monitoring of both shellfish and water is undertaken to ensure compliance with the Microbiological Reference Criteria for Food (shellfish) and harvesting is stopped if these criteria are exceeded. The New Zealand Food Safety Authority has a national monitoring programme for marine biotoxins. Levels of toxic algal in water and shellfish are regularly monitored at recreational and commercial sites from throughout the Auckland region. There have been public health warnings advising people not to eat or take shellfish in the Auckland region because of elevated levels of marine biotoxins. In 2000/2001 there was a biotoxin warning for the Manukau Harbour because of elevated levels of Paralytic Shellfish Poison caused by blooms of the toxic algae *Gymnodinium Catenatum*. This was the first time that *Gymnodinium Catenatum* had been found in New Zealand waters. During 2003 the Manukau and Kaipara Harbours and Auckland's West Coast beaches were closed for shellfish collecting due to elevated levels of Paralytic Shellfish Poison. In February 2004, there was a public health warning for Great Barrier Island as routine monitoring found Yessotoxin levels above safe levels in shellfish. Information on the current public health warnings for marine biotoxins can be accessed from the New Zealand Food Safety Authority's website. <http://www.nzfsa.govt.nz/consumers/marine-biotoxins>

With the exception of biotoxin monitoring, recreational shellfish beds in the Auckland region are not regularly monitored for public health reasons. Some shellfish monitoring for public health purposes is undertaken as part of compliance with discharge consent conditions, for example in the proximity of discharges from wastewater treatment plants as well as some industrial discharges. The New Zealand Food Safety Authority and the Ministry of Health advise that shellfish should not be gathered from built up areas or near sewage discharges.

#### *Gathering shellfish*

- ▶ Check the New Zealand Food Safety Authority's website for current public health warnings.
- ▶ Do not gather shellfish from near storm water drains and sewage outfalls or in urban areas.
- ▶ Do not gather shellfish after heavy rainfall.
- ▶ Make sure you know the bag limits and minimum legal size, if you do not check the Ministry of Fisheries website: <http://www.fish.govt.nz/recreational/daily-limit/>
- ▶ Use clean containers to carry shellfish.
- ▶ Keep cold when transporting, do not leave sitting out in the sun.

#### *Cooking and storing shellfish*

- ▶ Wash and dry hands properly before and after handling raw shellfish
- ▶ Store both cooked and live shellfish in the fridge.
- ▶ Use cooked shellfish within 2 days.
- ▶ Do not reheat more than once and always heat to steaming hot if reheating.
- ▶ Do not eat the skirt or gut of scallops.

### Short Notes

#### ▶ Drinking Water Update

- ▶ The proposed *Drinking Water Standards for New Zealand 2005* are currently available from the Ministry of Health and NZWWA websites for final comment. It is expected that these standards will be operational from 1 Jan 2006.
- ▶ It is understood that the changes proposed in the amendment to the Health Act 1956, will now be included in the new Public Health Bill to replace the Health Act 1956. This new legislation may be introduced into the House by the end of 2005, however, the timing and final content of the Bill is subject to change.
- ▶ Grading of large community water supplies (population > approx 500) using the new 2003 Grading Criteria has been deferred from the first quarter of 2005 until later in the year. The Drinking Water Assessment Unit will meet with affected suppliers in the second quarter of 2005.
- ▶ The Drinking Water Assessment Unit is also working towards IANZ accreditation later in 2005. Ramu, Tatiana, and Leslie are completing their studies towards the National Diploma of Drinking Water Assessment.

### Deepak Rama



Deepak joined the Environmental Health Team in February 2004. He holds a BSc in geography and an honours degree in planning from the University of Auckland and is a member of the New Zealand Planning Institute. Prior to joining ARPHS, he worked for local authorities in New Zealand and London, and for an environmental consulting firm. His current work areas include regulatory and strategic resource management planning. He has a particular interest in urban design and transport issues.