

Medical Officer of Health Environmental Health ADVICE

Inside

▶ Unflued gas eaters

▶ Report on the state of public health in the Auckland region

▶ Handwashing

▶ How ready are you for a Civil Defence Emergency?

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Introduction

New *Drinking-Water Standards New Zealand 2005* will replace the *Drinking Water Standards for New Zealand 2000* in December 2005. In this edition we outline the significant changes to the standards. Unflued gas heaters can expose people to high levels of indoor air pollutants. This issue outlines steps you can take to reduce exposure to indoor air pollutants when using unflued gas appliances. Washing and drying our hands correctly is something we all can do to help prevent the spread of illness.

New Manager for the Healthy Environments team

Te Miha Ua-Cookson is the new manager of Healthy Environments. Te Miha is also the ARPHS point of contact for territorial authorities. During 2004, Te Miha worked in a project management role with ARPHS on the State of Public Health Report. Previously he held a senior change management position with ADHB's mental health team and was a co-purchaser of public health services in the Auckland region working for Tihi Ora MaPO. Te Miha has completed the post graduate diploma in public health and has a BMS in management studies. During his university study he majored in urban and regional planning including resource management law.

Drinking-Water Standards New Zealand 2005 and Proposed Legislation



The new *Drinking - Water Standards New Zealand 2005* will replace the *Drinking Water Standards for New Zealand 2000*, and will come into effect on 31 December 2005.

The drinking-water standards apply to drinking-water, that is water intended to be used for human consumption, food preparation, utensil washing, oral hygiene or personal hygiene. The standards are applicable to all drinking-water except bottled water, which must comply with the Food Act 1981.

The *Drinking-Water Standards New Zealand 2005* include the following significant changes from the *Drinking Water Standards for New Zealand 2000*:

- ▶ Use of ultraviolet light (UV) disinfection
- ▶ Restructured protozoa criteria
- ▶ A section on cyanotoxins

- ▶ A section on small supplies
- ▶ A section on tankered water
- ▶ A requirement for a community drinking-water supply to have a Public Health Risk Management Plan (PHRMP).

A compliance with *Drinking-Water Standards New Zealand 2005* and implementation of PHRMPs will become mandatory when the Ministry of Health proposed Health (Drinking-Water) Amendment Bill comes into force (implementation to be phased in over 5-6 years).

The proposed Health (Drinking-Water) Amendment Bill on drinking-water safety will be in the form of an amendment to the Health Act 1956, with some amendments to other legislation - principally the Building Act 1991. The Bill will not include any amendments to the Resource Management Act 1991.

The Drinking-Water Technical Assistance Programme

The Drinking Water Technical Assistance Programme (TAP) is a government fund totalling \$136.9 million is to be established to help improve drinking water systems in New Zealand communities. TAP was announced by the government on 5 May 2005.

The TAP fund will set aside an average of 13.7 million a year

for ten years. Local authorities and other water suppliers will be able to apply to it for help, and assistance will be determined by a set of criteria agreed with local authorities and water supplies. The criteria have not been announced yet.

The TAP is expected to start 1 July 2005.

Unflued gas heaters

The Ministry of Health has issued a safety reminder about the use of unflued gas heaters. Unflued gas heaters burn gas to produce heat and have no flue or chimney to transfer combustion products including nitrogen dioxide and carbon monoxide to the outdoors. These air pollutants can build up to harmful levels in a room and are of particular concern for children, pregnant women, elderly people and people with asthma and heart disease. Unflued gas heaters also produce water vapour which can increase the spread of mould and dust mites.

If you use an unflued gas heater, the following steps will reduce exposure to air pollutants:

- ▶ Ensure the room that the heater is in is well ventilated by having internal doors open and at least one window to allow fresh air to enter the room.
- ▶ Do not use an unflued gas heater in a room where people sleep, in a bathroom, caravan or tent.
- ▶ Only use an unflued gas heater for short periods of time.
- ▶ Do not do any maintenance on an unflued gas heater yourself.
- ▶ Read and follow any instructions for the use of the appliance.
- ▶ Make sure that your unflued gas heater is serviced by a qualified person at least once a year.
- ▶ Make sure that the gas cylinder is within the test date – legally it can not be filled if it is out of test.

- ▶ Do not leave unflued gas heaters on overnight or when you go out.
- ▶ Any fixed gas appliances should be installed and serviced by a qualified person.

▶ Further information is available from the *Unflued Gas Heaters & Your Health Brochure* which is available from the enHealth Council website <http://enhealth.nphp.gov.au>.

General safety tips for home heating:

- ▶ **Do not** leave young children or pest alone with heaters or fires.
- ▶ Keep a one metre gap between heaters and fires and furniture, curtains and bedding.
- ▶ **Do not** dry clothes on heaters.
- ▶ Make sure children cannot touch or knock over free standing heaters.
- ▶ Use a fire guard to make sure children cannot put objects into or on top of heaters and fires.
- ▶ **Do not** use stoves or ovens to heat houses.
- ▶ Install a smoke alarm and check the batteries regularly.

Report on the State of Public Health in the Auckland Region

Planning is underway for the first report on the State of Public Health in the Auckland Region (SoPHAR). This report will complement the Maori Public Health report that will be available on the ARPHS website in a couple of weeks. The purpose of the State of Public Health Report is to:

- ▶ review, and provide a basis for monitoring, the health of the population in the Auckland region using key indicators;
- ▶ highlight health inequalities;
- ▶ link health to wider social and economic determinants;
- ▶ identify public health priorities and monitor trends;
- ▶ inform planning processes.

Why is the Auckland Regional Public Health Service (ARPHS) preparing such a report?

As the provider of public health services for the Auckland region, ARPHS collects and uses a wide range of information in its day-to-day work. ARPHS wish to make this information available to other organisations and stakeholders, and inform them about public health in the Auckland region. Regional and local policy planners are a key audience for such a report, as their decisions play a key role in determining the social and physical environment of the region, which impact on the health of the Auckland regional population.

The first report will be published in June/July 2006. After that, the report will be published every three years, with the possibility of particular issues being reported annually.

Handwashing

Correctly washing and drying your hands will reduce the spread of colds, flu, diarrhoea and sometimes serious or life-threatening diseases. Disease-causing micro-organisms can enter your body when your unwashed hands touch your nose, mouth and open wounds.

When should you wash your hands?

Before:

- ▶ Preparing or eating food
- ▶ Carrying out first aid
- ▶ Inserting or removing contact lenses
- ▶ Handling babies

After:

- ▶ Using the toilet
- ▶ Smoking
- ▶ Touching parts of the body other than hands
- ▶ Blowing your nose
- ▶ A work break and re-entering a food preparation area
- ▶ Handling garbage
- ▶ Handling money
- ▶ Handling an animal or animal waste
- ▶ Handling raw meat, poultry and other high risk foods
- ▶ Changing nappies



How should you wash your hands?

- ▶ Ingredients = running water + soap + friction + time
- ▶ Use soap and warm, running water
- ▶ Wash all parts of your hand thoroughly; including wrists, back of hands, palms, fingers and under the nails.
- ▶ Rub your hands together vigorously for 20 seconds (the time it takes to sing two verses of "Happy Birthday").

How should you dry your hands?

- ▶ Do not use the same towel repeatedly to dry your hands. This is because the towel is likely, in time, to become wet and may itself act as a source of hand contamination. Wet hands transfer bacteria more efficiently than dry hands not washed at all. Do not use tea towels to dry your hands.
- ▶ The following drying times are recommended:
- ▶ Single use towel (e.g. roller towel), use two sections for 10 seconds each. One to remove the bulk of the water and the second to result in complete dryness.
- ▶ Disposable paper towels. Two towels for 10 seconds each.
- ▶ Air towel 45 seconds.
- ▶ At home change hand towels daily.

How ready are you for a civil defence emergency?

Recent weather events have caused civil defence emergencies in several parts of New Zealand. Protecting you and your family's health is important during a civil defence emergency. You can reduce the chances of you or your family becoming ill during an emergency by:

- ▶ Maintaining a basic first aid kit with antiseptics and pain relief. You can either make your own or purchase them from pharmacies and supermarkets.
- ▶ Making sure you and members of your family have the medicines they need for specific health complaints.
- ▶ Keeping immunisations up to date.
- ▶ Being prepared to look after your family for several days during an emergency. Each household should have an emergency survival kit.

Emergency Survival Kit

Each household should have the following items handy in case of an emergency.

Health and safety

- ▶ First aid kit
- ▶ Essential medicines
- ▶ Insect repellent
- ▶ Fire extinguisher

Food and water

- ▶ Food-canned and dried
- ▶ Food that requires no cooking e.g. dried fruit, nuts, cereals
- ▶ Means of cooking, e.g. primus, barbecue
- ▶ Water- bottled and/or frozen
- ▶ Can opener and knife
- ▶ Household bleach and disinfectant
- ▶ Pet food supplies

Clothes, bedding and hygiene

- ▶ Clothing-warm, windproof and rainproof
- ▶ Strong shoes, rubber gloves
- ▶ Blankets or sleeping bags
- ▶ Plastic bags, garden lime, toilet paper, soap

Means of communication

- ▶ Waterproof torches and spare batteries
- ▶ Radio and spare batteries
- ▶ Pencil and paper

Further information is available from the Ministry of Health document *Protecting your health in an emergency*. Copies of this document are available from the HealthEd website www.healthed.govt.nz.

Short Notes

▶ Burning treated and painted timber

Treated and/or painted timber should not be burnt in domestic fires. Paint can contain lead and other potentially toxic heavy metals and treated timber products can contain copper chromium and arsenic. These toxic heavy metals can be released when the wood is burnt and people can be exposed through breathing in fumes. Burning treated or painted timber can also contaminate the inside of houses with metals.

▶ ARPHS training update

During June, Health Protection Officers from across ARPHS attended training courses on Biosecurity and the Hazardous Substances and New Organisms (HASNO) Act. These courses were held to improve the Service's capacity to react to interceptions of exotic mosquitoes and HASNO events such as chemical spillages. The courses were run by NZ Biosecure and Southern Monitoring Services, who run training courses on behalf of the Ministry of Health.

Auckland Regional Public Health Service Website

The ARPHS website www.arphs.govt.nz has been recently updated. Copies of ARPHS factsheets, media releases and publications including back copies of Environmental Health Advice are able to be downloaded. Other quarterly advice publications available from the website are Medical Officer of Health Public Health Advice, Food Safety Advice, Imported Product Advice and Public Health Nutrition Advice.

Shannon Palmer



Shannon Palmer joined the Healthy Environments Team for work experience towards her Bachelor of Science (Technology) degree at the University of Waikato. During her 8 month placement Shannon worked within the Biosecurity Team on an Enhanced Vector Surveillance Project. Shannon has now completed her degree and has accepted a position as a Technical Officer within the Healthy Environments Team. This year, she will commence a Graduate Diploma in Environmental Health through Massey University with the long-term goal of becoming a designated Health Protection Officer.