

A Report from the Communicable Diseases Network Australia October – December 2004

The Communicable Diseases Network Australia (CDNA) consists of communicable disease authorities from various Australian Government agencies and state and territory health authorities, in addition to expert bodies and individuals in the specific areas of communicable disease epidemiology, clinical management, disease control and laboratory diagnosis. The CDNA provides national public health leadership and co-ordination on communicable disease surveillance, prevention and control, and offers strategic advice to governments and other key bodies on public health actions to minimise the impact of communicable diseases in Australia and the region.

Summary of major CDNA activities for the period October to December 2004

During this quarter, CDNA identified several projects/areas to be addressed including:

- consideration and endorsement of the National HIV/AIDS and STI Strategy 2005 – 2008 and the National Hepatitis C Strategy 2005 – 2008;
- advising the Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation on Japanese encephalitis vaccination for travellers to Papua New Guinea;
- responding to the high incidence of an unidentified desquamating rash in methadone users;
- consideration of the implications of recommendations made in the *Improving Indigenous Identification in Communicable Disease Systems* report; and
- providing input to the Australian Government's response to public health issues related to the Asian Tsunami.

National HIV/AIDS and STI Strategy 2005 – 2008 and National Hepatitis C Strategy 2005 – 2008

The Intergovernmental Committee on AIDS, Hepatitis and Related Diseases (IGCAHRD) submitted the draft National HIV/AIDS and STI Strategy 2005 – 2008 and the draft National Hepatitis C Strategy 2005 – 2008 to CDNA for endorsement. These strategies form the overarching framework and direction

for policy and program design and implementation in Australia's response to these infections and they are scheduled to take effect from 1 July 2005.

The CDNA and Public Health Laboratory Network (a sub-committee of CDNA), offered comments relating to:

- laboratory testing;
- laboratory policy and quality assurance mechanisms;
- drug access issues; and
- implementation issues.

Advice on Japanese encephalitis vaccination for travellers to Papua New Guinea

The Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI) sought CDNA advice in relation to the recommendations for vaccination against Japanese encephalitis virus for Australians travelling to Papua New Guinea for a month or more, especially in the wet season. CDNA members resolved to accept the ATAGI recommendation to amend the *Australian Immunisation Handbook* 8th edition to recommend Japanese encephalitis virus vaccination to such travellers.

Response to the unidentified desquamating rash in methadone users

In October 2004, a desquamating rash was identified in intravenous drug users receiving methadone. By November 2004, 421 cases had been reported, mostly in western Sydney. Due to a lack of laboratory evidence, a recall of suspect batches of methadone was rejected by the Therapeutic Goods Administration and the manufacturer. At this stage, as an interim precautionary measure CDNA (with agreement from the Commonwealth Chief Medical Officer) advised all states and territories to withdraw and quarantine suspect batches of methadone. CDNA is currently awaiting a final report on the epidemiological investigation conducted by the NSW Department of Health, before advising states and territories on the destruction of quarantined batches of methadone.

Response to the Improving Indigenous Identification in Communicable Disease Systems Report

The *Improving Indigenous Identification in Communicable Disease Systems Report* is the result of over four years collaboration between the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing (DoHA), the Improving Indigenous Identification Communicable Disease Reporting Project Steering Committee and various stakeholders. This report will inform policy relating to Indigenous health and its recommendations will be implemented over the next four to six years. A CDNA working group was established in December 2004 to develop a response to the report's recommendations by mid to late 2005.

Response to the Asian Tsunami

In response to the Asian Tsunami on 26 December 2004, the CDNA held two emergency teleconferences to discuss public health aspects of the Australian Government response, through providing input to the Australian Health Disasters Management Policy Committee directly and representation on its Public Health sub-committee. The CDNA Tsunami Protocols Working Group was formed to develop fact sheets to provide information for relief workers travelling to and returning from tsunami affected areas. These were posted on the DoHA website in January 2005.