

Victorian Food Safety News

Volume 3, Spring 2005

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Forum highlights food safety research

A Food Safety Forum open to those working to promote, enforce and support food safety proved a great success with more than 180 people attending from across Victoria and interstate. Environmental Health Officers from metropolitan and rural Victorian councils attended in force, as well as representatives from regulatory bodies, training organisations, Commonwealth and State Governments, and food businesses.

Hosted by the Department of Human Services Food Safety Unit and held at the Telstra Dome in May 2005, the forum provided an opportunity to update attendees on the latest research and sampling outcomes and outline the Food Safety Unit's strategic directions. It was also an effective vehicle for sharing information, knowledge and experiences.

As well as a number of informative presentations, the floor was open for questions and discussion. The level of interest and exchange was impressive, indicating that there are many issues important in the food sector and, of course, never enough time to touch on them all.

Terry Laidler, well known commentator and psychologist, was the MC. He opened the forum, provided session summaries and kept the program moving along so that lots of ground was covered.

Feedback indicated that over nine in 10 attendees were satisfied with the quality and content of the forum with Session 2 Research Outcomes and Session 3 Case Studies being the most popular.

For an overview of the forum and a snapshot of some of the presentations, go to pages 8 and 9.



Joy Gregory, OzFoodNet, and Victor DiPaola and Gary Smith of the Food Safety Unit were presenters at the Food Safety Forum.

Workshops focus on food safety assessment

The Australian Institute of Environmental Health (AIEH) Food Safety Assessment Tool provides the foundation for a common approach to assessing food safety compliance by local council Environmental Health Officers. However, the tool has not been used widely or consistently across the state.

To understand the barriers to adopting the AIEH tool, the Department of Human Services Food Safety Unit engaged Australian Food Hygiene Services Pty. Ltd to research how and why the assessment tool is being used. The ultimate aim is to promote the tool and support a clear and consistent process for assessing food safety compliance in food businesses.

Australian Food Hygiene Services Pty. Ltd. interviewed 20 Environmental Health Officers from various councils and conducted 12 workshops across Victoria.

The workshops looked closely at the assessment tool and discussed issues around content, design, usability, terminology, relationship to standards and templates, relevance of an electronic tool, the ability to tailor assessment tools, and the value of supportive documents and resources. Compliance questions were also discussed.

The workshops provided an opportunity for Environmental Health Officers to share their experiences, ideas and approaches and talk directly to Food Safety Unit representatives.



Michael West, from the Food Safety Unit, discussing the assessment tool with workshop delegates.

Food safety on show at Austin and Mercy open day

Food safety was a feature of the health and community services displays at the opening of the new Austin Hospital and Mercy Hospital for Women.

More than 10,000 people attended the Community Open Day on Saturday 7 May 2005, taking advantage of the opportunity to look inside this new state-of-the-art hospital complex.

Located on one site in Heidelberg, the two hospitals, along with the Warringal Private Hospital, now form Victoria's largest medical precinct.

Together the hospitals will deliver care for the whole family—from premature babies needing Mercy's specialist care to older Victorians needing Austin's aged care services.

The Food Safety display provided information about food safety in the home. More than 1,000 consumer information kits, including the booklet *Your guide to food safety*, the *Avoid the temperature danger zone* fridge magnet and a fridge thermometer, were handed out.



The Food Safety Unit's Roger Pierotti handing out food safety tips.

Seafood standard a first in food safety regulation

For the first time in Australia, the food safety of an entire industry sector—the seafood industry—is now being managed through consistent national standards.

The new food safety standard, covering the production and processing of seafood, including both imported and domestically harvested product, was launched in June 2005 by the Parliamentary Secretary for Health and Ageing, the Hon Christopher Pyne MP.

The national standard becomes mandatory in 2007. It replaces state regulation and is supported by voluntary industry codes of practice. A guide is also available to assist enforcement officers and industry to understand the provisions of the new standard.

The standard requires primary producers in the seafood industry to abide by basic hygiene provisions already in the *Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code* for the handling, transportation and storage of seafood by manufacturers and retailers. These basic provisions are designed to minimise food safety hazards and cover primary production and processing activities that are not currently regulated under the Code. There are also provisions for the primary production and processing of oysters and other bivalve molluscs.



A whole-of-chain approach

This new Seafood Standard recognises that food safety needs to be considered more thoroughly at all stages, from the production of food to its sale.

The Standard reflects the whole-of-chain approach adopted in Australia in 2002 as part of continuing improvement to food safety. It is designed to ensure that consumers have the highest confidence in the safety of the food they buy.

FSANZ was given responsibility for developing food safety standards in the primary production and processing part of the food chain—Primary Production and Processing (PPP) Standards—for inclusion in the *Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code*. PPP standards are mandatory national regulations, enforced by all states and territories.



Developing the Standard was a collaborative effort over three years, involving Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ), the seafood industry and state and territory jurisdictions and consumers. Managing Director of Seafood Services Australia, Ted Loveday, recognised the existing high standards that the majority of seafood businesses meet. 'This standard builds on the foundation formed by the industry's own voluntary codes,' he said.

The Seafood Primary Production and Processing (PPP) Standard is the first of a number of standards to be developed for the primary sector, including for the poultry meat and dairy industries. Seafood was selected as the first PPP Standard because there was no national regulatory standard and the peak seafood industry body was in the advanced stages of developing its own industry-preferred voluntary standard for the hygienic production of seafood.

In Victoria, Primesafe will be the responsible agency for enforcing the implementation of the PPP Standard.

Copies of the PPP Standard for Seafood, the interpretive guide and other supporting documents can be found on the FSANZ website at www.foodstandards.gov.au.

Food for thought— New food

A new species of rodent has been discovered—for sale on a food stall in a market in Laos. The rock rat or kha-nyou, was spotted by a conservation biologist on a table next to some vegetables. Locals prepare the rodent for eating by roasting it on a skewer. It looks something like a cross between a large dark rat and a squirrel.

Source: DHS News Notes, 8 June 2005

North and west councils report on food safety roles and responsibilities

Ten councils in the Department of Human Services North and West Region participated in the Regional Food Safety Activities Survey, which looked at the approaches councils take in carrying out their roles and responsibilities under the *Food Act 1984*.

Information collected through the survey provides input to improve administrative processes and strengthen food safety activities of councils. The survey also provided an insight into the related areas of business and community education.

The survey findings related to staff and administration, compliance checks, food sampling, enforcement, performance measurement and rewards, reporting and community education.

The survey indicated a ratio of one Authorised Officer (Environmental Health Officer) for every 120 food businesses, with 75 Authorised Officers and 8,988 registered food premises in the region. While the participating councils appear adequately staffed, the survey indicated a shortfall in systems that determine performance and deployment of resources as well as a lack of reward systems to acknowledge businesses that consistently perform well.

...insight into the related areas of business and community education...

The survey also indicated that all participating councils were in favour of taking a more consistent approach to undertaking responsibilities under the Food Act.

For more information contact John Whittam, Regional Environmental Health Officer, Department of Human Services North and West Metropolitan Region (03) 9412 5408, email: John.Whittam@dhs.vic.gov.au

Other key findings include:

- Up to half of the councils aim to inspect all premises at least annually.
- Nine in 10 councils use checklists for inspections and compliance checks.
- Half of the councils carried out inspections unannounced and the other half carried out a mix of unannounced and prearranged inspections.
- Ninety-one per cent of the samples taken were for microbiological testing, of which the vast majority was for food analysis (95 per cent), with the remaining 5 per cent for other practices such as swabbing of surfaces.
- Three in 10 councils sampled all local manufacturers annually for microbiological and chemical compositional quality.
- Three in 10 councils sampled all Class 1 and Class 2 premises (selling high risk foods) annually for microbiological quality.
- All councils, except one, routinely issued orders under section 19 of the Food Act.
- In regard to food safety program breaches, eight in 10 participating councils wanted access to an alternative penalty, such as infringement notices.
- Six in 10 participating councils were in favour of publishing inspection results.
- Eight in 10 councils indicated that they would be willing to report annually on statutory and associated activities.
- Nine in 10 participating councils produce newsletters for distribution to food businesses and 70 per cent indicated that they were involved in community education.



Food safety profiles

Featuring... Dairy Food Safety Victoria

In regulating one of Victoria's most important primary industries, Dairy Food Safety Victoria (DFSV) takes a whole of production and processing approach that extends from the food and water given to cows (or sheep, goats and even buffalo) to the back door of retail.

Established in 2000 to maintain safety standards set out in the *Dairy Act 2000*, DFSV has diverse responsibilities in ensuring dairy products are of the highest quality for consumption throughout Australia and in the growing export markets.



These responsibilities range from licensing and auditing farms and manufacturers to assessing and approving food safety programs. DFSV also conducts surveys and microbiological studies, investigates incidents and complaints, and works with the Department of Human Services on product recalls and outbreaks.

Victoria's dairy industry has an excellent record in food safety and a high level of compliance with regulations. Critical issues are generally dealt with quickly and effectively through a cooperative approach. DFSV has never had to prosecute a farmer for non-compliance due to on-farm quality assurance programs that cover all the essential food safety requirements.

The effectiveness of DFSV is largely attributed to the dairy industry taking food safety very seriously and to the collaborative approach between industry, DFSV and government regulatory authorities.

Victoria—the dairy state

- Produces 66 per cent of the milk produced in Australia.
- 85 per cent of this is exported.
- DFSV licenses 6,110 dairy farms and 142 manufacturers.
- The dairy industry is vital to Victoria's economy and is the lifeblood of many communities and regions.

According to Dr Anne Astin, DFSV's Chief Executive Officer, the dairy industry has a mature approach to food safety. 'DFSV enjoys cooperation and support from the manufacturing sector and from dairy farmers. We don't just take a regulatory approach. We work with farmers and manufacturers to help them build food safety into their everyday practices', she said. 'However, we would not hesitate to use our regulatory powers if there was a risk to consumers.'



Public health is a major focus for DFSV. The Dairy Food Safety Scheme, devised and implemented by DFSV in partnership with industry, includes a dairy licence, food safety program approval process and an audit system. All Victorian dairy farm businesses supplying cows' milk have a food safety program in place, which is independently audited and approved by DFSV. For the manufacturing sector, DFSV currently audits plants and processes, however is looking to establish a system of independent auditing.

DFSV also plays a leadership role in developing a national framework for dairy food safety—a key objective is to achieve consistency in standards and reduce compliance costs for industry. The Code of Practice for Dairy Food Safety, supporting guidelines and technical standards, developed by DFSV in consultation with the industry, are likely to become national guidelines.

The dairy industry is also one of the first food industries to work with Food Standards Australia and New Zealand (FSANZ) to develop primary production and processing (PPP) standards, which take a whole of chain approach to food safety.



Looking to the future, DFSV is focusing on promoting education, knowledge and innovation within the industry. DFSV supports research, science and new technology, in particular exploring how trends and advances can be identified and translated into best practice standards and knowledge for farmers and factories.

DFSV also realises the need to be aware of and prepared for industry, product and technology changes and the implications for food safety. 'Food safety is becoming part of a broader ethical framework that is extending into areas such as food ethics, environmental management and animal welfare. DFSV needs to know where the food and dairy industry is heading and be involved in these issues', said Dr Astin.

For more information about DFSV, visit www.dairysafe.vic.gov.au

Food Safety Unit

Achievements and outcomes 2004–2005 and planned activities 2005–2006

Achievements and outcomes 2004–2005

In 2004–05, the first year of the Department of Human Services Food Safety Unit's new Strategic Directions, the Unit focused on investigation and research into consumer, food business and food enforcement sectors, as well as the pathogenic risks of a range of foods.

Key achievements include:

- Enhancing stakeholder capabilities to deal with culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) food businesses and consumers through the development and implementation of a range of new resources and training workshops; and
- Providing input into national food policy setting and standards development; facilitating whole-of-government responses; and integrating advice from the re-established Food Safety Council.

The achievements of 2004–05 provide the foundation and knowledge to enhance the development and implementation of food safety initiatives over the next years.

Activities for 2005–2006

In 2005–06, the Food Safety Unit will build on the investigative and development work of the previous year, putting into place actions and initiatives to drive food safety forward.

The key areas for action in 2005–06 will include:

- the food and health interface
- identifying emerging food safety risks and trends
- strengthening food safety enforcement workforce capacity and capabilities.

The Food Safety Unit will continue to improve its business activity through:

- marketing the benefits and outcomes of the unit's work
- program review and evaluation
- monitoring and identifying risks to inform forward planning.

Key business challenges for the Unit are:

- preparedness and managing involvement with the Commonwealth Games
- relocation to new offices
- working with other public health programs and with municipal councils
- organisational changes to the Department of Human Services Public Health Group.

This year's activities have been planned within the context of the Department of Human Services Public Health Group's Strategic Directions 2005–2008, the Social and Environmental Health Branch Plan and the Food Safety Unit's Strategic Directions 2004–2007.

Strategic direction	Achievements and outcomes 2004–2005
<p>Strengthen the administration of the Food Safety regulatory framework in Victoria</p>	<p>Initiated research relating to the Food Safety Supervisor requirement of the Food Act.</p> <p>Initiated project to develop Temporary Food Premises Policy for use by local councils. Consultative committee established and draft developed.</p> <p>Reviewed and streamlined process for template approval.</p> <p>Reviewed process and protocols for Food Safety Auditor management. Recommendations under consideration.</p> <p>Successfully prosecuted food business for breach of a Food Act Order.</p> <p>Provided ongoing input to the development of national policy and regulatory framework, including the national audit framework, health claims watchdog and addition of substances to food policy.</p> <p>Reviewed and enhanced Food Safety Unit and Victorian input to the standards development process.</p> <p>Continued development and implementation of VicFIN (<i>Victorian Food Safety Information Network—an online information exchange for stakeholders involved in food safety regulation and enforcement</i>).</p> <p>Commissioned study into methodology to calculate declared fat content on nutrition information panels to assess need for regulatory intervention.</p> <p>Conducted study into consumer confidence in the food they buy and eat, which identified:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • overall, 94 per cent of Victorians are confident that the food they buy and eat in Victoria is safe to eat • 66 per cent of Victorians are confident that authorities are doing enough to ensure food is safe to eat • 82 per cent of Victorians are confident that food businesses sell food that is safe to eat • 67 per cent of Victorians are confident that food businesses follow food safety laws.

Activity	Achievements and outcomes 2004–2005
<p>Increase stakeholder knowledge, capacity and innovation to facilitate an effective food regulatory system</p>	<p>Researched technology options for local government business compliance checking. Recommendations to be trialled in 2005–06.</p> <p>Research into business food safety information needs and preferences identified:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • over 60 per cent of businesses rated information resources as good to excellent • 91 per cent of businesses considered access to food safety information as easy to very easy • 96 per cent of businesses considered Department of Human Services information as credible • 28 per cent of businesses made changes to practices as a result of the information received. <p>Published and translated into seven languages ‘supplements’ to the Department of Human Services Food Safety Program Template for retail and food service businesses, for the safe production of traditional foods.</p> <p>Commissioned research into the workforce and skills required to administer the Food Act.</p> <p>Commissioned research to identify the professional development needs of local government authorised officers.</p> <p>Conducted training sessions across Victoria for local government officers in dealing with CALD businesses and implementation of AIEH compliance check tool.</p> <p>Published on the food safety website, a Memorandum of Understanding with Dairy Food Safety Victoria, Primesafe and the Municipal Association of Victoria, delineating roles and responsibilities in food regulation interpretation and enforcement.</p> <p>Published and disseminated to more than 500 stakeholders the <i>Food Safety Unit Strategic Directions 2005–2007</i>.</p> <p>Re-established the Food Safety Council with revised membership.</p> <p>Published and disseminated to more than 800 stakeholders, two editions of <i>Victorian Food Safety News</i>.</p> <p>Published and disseminated to more than 250 Environmental Health Officers four editions of the <i>EHO Bulletin</i>.</p> <p>Held display at Fine Food Australia 2005 exhibition.</p> <p>Conducted two food safety auditor forums.</p> <p>Conducted a Food safety forum for more than 180 Municipal Council Environmental Health Officers and other stakeholders involved in food safety implementation.</p> <p>New resources revised and published:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food Safety Supervisors factsheet. • Food handlers training factsheet.
<p>Increase the knowledge base of emerging risks and trends</p>	<p>Established access to appropriate food safety research material for the Unit.</p> <p>Commissioned a study into pathogen contamination of vitamised meals in aged care settings in response to high incidence of foodborne illness.</p> <p>Commissioned horticulture products study to identify source of pathogen contamination of fruit and vegetables available for retail sale.</p> <p>Commissioned a study to determine safe temperature for retail storage of soft cheeses.</p> <p>Commissioned research to identify levels of sulphur dioxide in fresh soft summer fruits and in foods containing dried fruits and vegetables.</p>
<p>Increase consumer awareness and knowledge of safe food practices</p>	<p>Options identified for point-of-sale food safety communication program.</p> <p>Displays at events, dissemination of food safety information to more than 5,000 visitors at:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good Food and Wine Show 2005 • Austin and Mercy Hospitals Open Day. <p>Consumer information factsheet, <i>Your guide to food safety</i>, translated into 23 languages and published on the food safety website.</p>

Were you spotted at the Food Safety Forum?



FORUM SNAPSHOTS

In welcoming everyone to the Food Safety Forum, Jan Norton, Director Social and Environmental Health, Department of Human Services, acknowledged the valuable contribution that all stakeholders make in ensuring food safety in Victoria. Ms Norton described the forum as 'a great starting point for increasing communication within the sector and improving our understanding of each other's roles, skills and knowledge'.

Jennifer McDonald, Manager Food Safety and Water Regulation, outlined the Food Safety Unit's strategic directions, acknowledging that these 'raised the bar and encouraged new thinking'.

The presentations focused on trends in outbreaks, food handling skills and food safety knowledge; and the lessons learnt from case studies on foods such as chicken, fruit juice and smallgoods.

Chicken meat

Victor Di Paola, Program Manager, Compliance and Technical Development, Food Safety Unit, presented the results of a recent survey identifying *Salmonella* and *Campylobacter* contamination of chicken meat in Victoria.

Conducted by the Department of Human Services Food Safety Unit, the survey of packaged chicken meat from retail outlets found that 88 per cent of the samples collected were contaminated with *Campylobacter* and 70 per cent with *Salmonella*.

The survey involved microbiological testing of 123 samples of chicken meat packaged before delivery to the retail store. Samples included a range of fillets, meat on the bone, whole chickens, mince and diced meat.

Mr Di Paola compared the results of this study to similar studies in NSW, South Australia the ACT and Wales, where high levels of *Salmonella* and *Campylobacter* were also found in chicken meat.

The discussion session highlighted a diverse range of issues, addressing questions and concerns that had been sent to the Food Safety Unit in advance, as well as issues raised from the floor. The issues covered areas such as training, interpreting and enforcing Food Safety Programs, effectiveness of VicFin, time and resource constraints in enforcing the Food Act, dealing with food safety emergencies, the role of auditors, food safety standards, the application of emerging technology, legal liability and insurance, and working with culturally and linguistically diverse businesses—to name a few.

The following snapshots provide a glance at some of the topics presented at the forum.

The Salmonella Control Program 1992–2002 conducted in Denmark was also commented on. Through a flock elimination strategy, the program decreased Salmonella levels in broiler chicken flocks from 12.9 per cent to 1.5 per cent, with a corresponding 60 per cent decrease in human *Salmonellosis*.

The presentation commented on potential sources of contamination of chicken flocks that could include:

- The feed—chicken feed often contains rendered chicken from abattoirs.
- The condition of broiler sheds—90 per cent of sheds have dirt floors which cannot be sanitised and, therefore, contribute to contamination.
- Methods of transport—live chickens are transported in cages, which makes it easy for the birds to contaminate each other.

For more information contact Victor Di Paola on (03) 9637 4893 or email: Victor.DiPaola@dhs.vic.gov.au

Investigating a food poisoning outbreak—a case study

In January 2004, a Melbourne pizza restaurant was the source of an outbreak of food-borne illness affecting at least 90 people. This case study, presented by Victor Di Paola, provides an example of what is involved in investigating an outbreak and ensuring that further illness is prevented.

Following numerous reports of diarrhoea and vomiting, the Department of Human Services advised the local council of the illnesses and requested a site visit and clean up. The department's Communicable Diseases Unit conducted a case series investigation using the restaurant booking list. The investigation and epidemiological study revealed 90 cases of illness—41 confirmed and 49 probable—caused by *Salmonella Typhitium phage type 9* (STM 9), which was found in cooked chicken, ham, salami and marinara mix samples taken from the restaurant.

A supervised clean up of the restaurant was undertaken and further food samples collected and tested. Despite the clean up, positive results were still being received on the samples of chicken and marinara mix, indicating cross

Lessons learned from this outbreak:

- Care is required when preparing and cooking large batches of food.
- Prepare raw meats away from where pizza and other foods are prepared.
- Chicken meat needs to be cooked thoroughly, to an internal temperature of at least 75°C.
- Conveyor pizza ovens are designed to cook pizza and not necessarily other foods.
- Chlorine based sanitisers should be used to clean and sanitise benches and equipment between food preparation processes; other sanitisers don't seem to be as effective.
- Don't top-up pizza ingredient wells and don't use leftovers on the following day.
- Don't reuse the same cloths for different cleaning tasks.
- Food Safety Programs need to be fully documented and updated.
- Have a cleaning schedule.

contamination from the pizza ingredient wells. The premises was voluntarily closed and a second supervised clean up was undertaken.

The investigation found that the restaurant had made an unusual bulk purchase of chicken six weeks prior and had been cooking and freezing the chicken prior to use. The raw chicken was being processed where the pizzas were prepared and the

same conveyor belt oven was used. Other findings included reuse of cloths, inadequate handwashing facilities, use of leftover food, and inadequate sanitising. While the outbreak was caused by cross contamination from the chicken, a combination of factors contributed to create an unhygienic environment.



Food for thought— New energy drink?

Police in Peru have launched a campaign to save frogs from being turned into an aphrodisiac drink. 'Frogshake' is popular among natives as a stimulant that enhances male sexual performance. Police saved 4,000 frogs from being juiced to make the drink in a raid on a Lima warehouse.

Source: DHS News Notes, 24 May 2005

Smallgoods survey

The results of a survey conducted by the Department of Human Services Food Safety Unit, have shown that samples of both cooked and uncooked smallgoods manufactured in Australia comply to the relevant food standards with no detection of harmful bacteria

The study tested the microbiological quality of smallgoods produced in Australia and sold in Victoria. Samples included ham, bacon, pastrami, sausages, corned beef, pate, liver paste, roasted and dried meats, and uncooked comminuted fermented meats, such as salami, csabai, chorizo and cabanosi.

The results showed 100 per cent compliance with Standard 1.6.1 Microbiological Limits for Food of the Food Standards Code

A total of 162 samples were purchased and submitted to the Microbiological Diagnostic Unit for testing. The results showed 100 per cent compliance with Standard 1.6.1 Microbiological Limits for Food of the Food Standards Code; with no detection of *Listeria monocytogenes*, *E.coli*, *Salmonella* or *Coagulase-positive Staphylococci*.

For more information, contact Violette Lazanas, Food Safety Officer, Food Safety Unit, on (03) 9637 4086 or email: Violette.Lazanas@dhs.vic.gov.au



Food handler skills and knowledge

Gary Smith, Program Manager, Systems and Capacity Building, Food Safety Unit presented results of a study into the levels of food safety skills and knowledge of food handlers in food businesses.

The results of the 2004 survey were compared to those of a survey conducted in 2002, indicating various improvements in food handler knowledge that could be attributed to the implementation of mandatory Food Safety Programs and the requirement of Food Safety Supervisors.

Key changes identified include:

- A significant increase in the number of qualified Food Safety Supervisors (29–55 per cent).
- Increased knowledge of which foods need to be refrigerated.
- Increased knowledge of time limits in which high-risk chilled foods can be kept at room temperature.
- Increased knowledge that detergents don't kill micro-organisms (15–31 per cent).

Implications of the findings

- Businesses must take more responsibility for educating junior staff.
- Knowledge of temperatures/time relationship needs to improve.
- The difference between sanitising and cleaning needs to be better understood.

- Overall, 95 per cent of all respondents described themselves as informed compared to 78 per cent in 2002.

Even though food safety knowledge had generally improved, the tendency remains for senior staff to be better educated in food safety than junior staff.

The level of knowledge varied across registered food business types. Food handlers in take-away and fast food restaurants were most consistent in providing inaccurate responses while food handlers in Class 1 businesses were either the most correct or chose the most conservative answer.

Foodborne illness facts from OzFoodNet

Joy Gregory, OzFoodNet epidemiologist, provided information to the forum about the activities of OzFoodNet, Australia’s national collaborative program for investigating and understanding foodborne illness.

In 2003, OzFoodNet conducted enhanced surveillance of foodborne diseases across Australia. During 2003, there were 23,250 notifications of eight potentially foodborne diseases, of which 67 per cent were due to *Campylobacter* and 30 per cent to *Salmonella*.

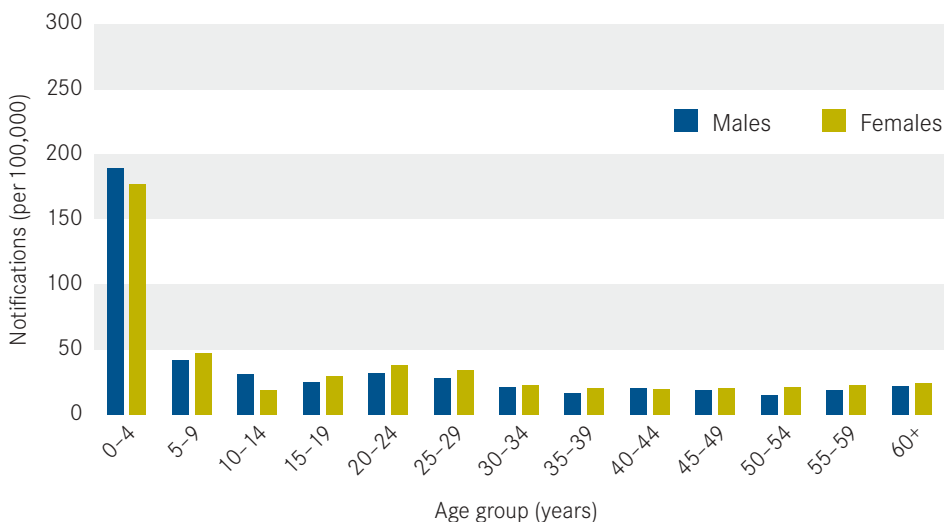
In looking at foodborne disease, Ms Gregory provided data about the main foodborne pathogens, the most likely food sources of illness, and the settings where these foods were produced and consumed.

During 2003, there were 23,250 notifications of eight potentially foodborne diseases, of which 67 per cent were due to *Campylobacter* and 30 per cent to *Salmonella*.

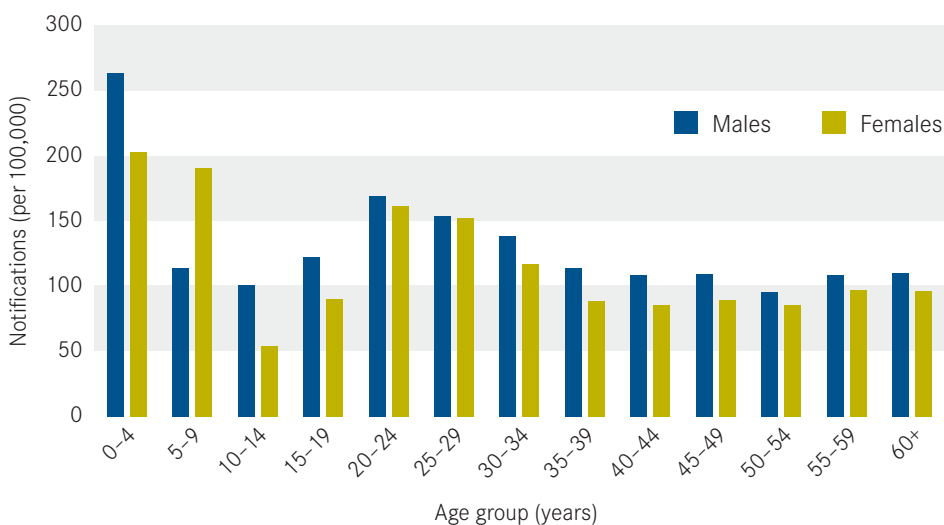
The charts show notification rates for *Salmonella* and *Campylobacter* in 2003, as well as a breakdown of the major food types linked to outbreaks in 2003.

For more information, contact Joy Gregory, Department of Human Services, on Tel: (03) 9637 5897 or email: joy.gregory@dhs.vic.gov.au

Salmonella 2003



Campylobacter 2003



Top 10 food types

Food Category	No. Outbreaks	No. Affected
Fish	43	246
Chicken	24	292
Mixed meat dishes	21	480
Mixed dishes	18	547
Rice dishes	12	126
Pizza	12	89
Pork	11	360
Cake	9	182
Desserts	9	272
Salad	8	230

Survey assesses food safety risk of dips

A survey of dips prepared on site at restaurants and other premises was recently conducted across 14 local government areas in Melbourne's north, west and southern regions.

Of the 223 samples submitted, no sample was found to have Salmonella and 94.2 per cent of samples delivered satisfactory results. Coagulase positive staphylococci was found in 3.6 per cent of the samples, E.coli in 1.3 per cent of the samples and Coagulase positive staphylococci and E.coli together in 0.9 per cent of the samples.

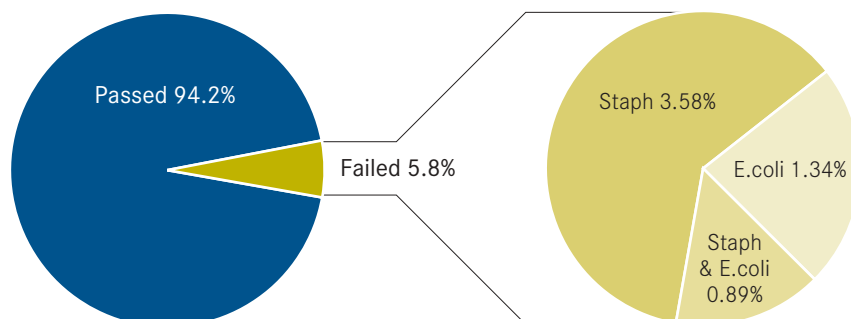
The North-West and Southern Food Surveillance Groups proposed this survey to determine food safety risk of dips prepared on site at various types of premises. This follows a Salmonella outbreak in January 2005, which was linked to dips prepared on site at a Turkish restaurant, and an observed trend for more types of premises preparing their own fresh dips on site.

The survey included a variety of dips, as long as they had been prepared on the premises. While a minimum of 5–10 samples per council was recommended, some councils submitted more samples, reflecting the number of premises and the availability of dips in their area.

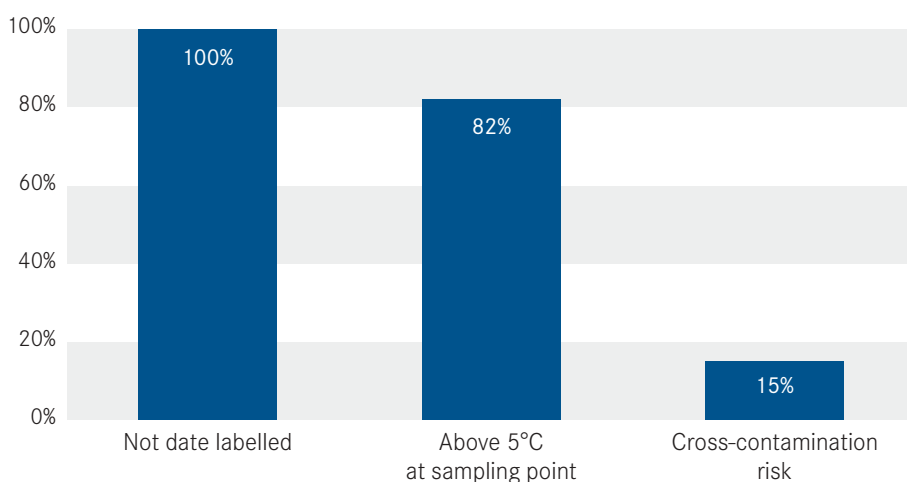
The findings indicate that, while the overall risk to public health would appear to be low, pathogens could be introduced into the dips if proper care was not taken.

For more information, contact:
John Whittam, Environmental Health Officer, North and West Metropolitan Region, Tel: (03) 9412 5408; email: john.whittam@dhs.vic.gov.au

Results



Contributing factors



Whittlesea surveys food businesses satisfaction

Whittlesea City Council's survey of local food premises has indicated high levels of satisfaction with Council's inspection and compliance check activities.

The Food Act Premises Inspections/Compliance Check Survey was attached to the annual Food Act registration renewal forms and mailed to 680 proprietors in October 2004. While only 27 per cent of surveys were returned, the results were up in most areas compared with the 2003 survey, suggesting an improvement in services.

General comments from food businesses indicated that overall proprietors are satisfied with the level of service provided by council.

The responses indicated that proprietors would prefer Environmental Health Officers to make appointments prior to inspections. However, for inspections and follow up checks to give a true indication of the standard of the food premises and the opportunity to ensure that safe food practices are followed during the busiest times, unannounced visits are recommended.

At this stage council is planning to continue the survey in its current form in 2005.

For more information contact Neville Kurth, City of Whittlesea, Email: Neville.Kurth@whittlesea.vic.gov.au

Interstate News

Survey checks colours against the Code

A recent South Australian survey examined 245 products and 18 food categories for compliance with the Food Standards Code, Food Additives Standard (1.3.1), which regulates the addition of food colours in the production and processing of food.

Ninety-seven per cent of products sampled met the Code requirements; four products had levels exceeding those set in the Code; and four samples had the incorrect colour declared on the label.



Flavoured milk, which exceeded the standards by 63 per cent, is considered the most significant of the non-conformances, because it is widely consumed by children.

This survey highlights the need for manufacturers to scrutinise product formulations carefully and ensure that labels are updated when product formulations are changed.

For further information, contact Phil Eckert, SA Department of Health, Tel: (08) 8226 7131

Email: phil.eckert@health.sa.gov.au

Investigating caffeine levels in energy drinks

A 2004 survey conducted by the South Australian Department of Health assessed compliance with Standard 2.6.4 of the Food Standards Code, which regulates the use of caffeine in energy drinks.

Ten drinks were purchased from retailers in central Adelaide. Test results showed that 40 per cent of formulated caffeinated beverages (four products) exceeded the caffeine limit in the Code by amounts as high as 44 per cent.

Food regulators in Australia are aware of the results of this survey and need to consider enforcement action should future breaches be detected.

For further information, contact Phil Eckert, SA Department of Health, Tel: (08) 8226 7131

Email: phil.eckert@health.sa.gov.au

Testing accuracy of 'gluten free' claims

The accuracy of 'gluten free' claims on labels is critical in enabling people suffering from Coeliac Disease to make an informed purchasing choice and protect their health.

Food Standards Code 1.2.8 (Part 2) states that claims that a food is 'gluten free' must not be made unless the food contains no detectable gluten.

Fifty-three foods with 'gluten free' claims were purchased from eight retail outlets in Adelaide. The survey found that 98 per cent of products contained no detectable gluten. One sample of imported cornflour contained a low level of gluten and the importer has applied appropriate corrective action.

For further information, contact Phil Eckert, SA Department of Health, Tel: (08) 8226 7131

Email: phil.eckert@health.sa.gov.au

Sesame seeds under the microscope

In Australia and overseas, sesame seeds and sesame seed products have been linked with outbreaks of foodborne illness, mainly due to contamination with Salmonella.

A survey coordinated by FSANZ in 2004 tested 40 samples from a range of outlets. Salmonella Richmond was detected in one sample of imported white sesame seeds and that product was recalled and the Australian Quarantine Inspections Service (AQIS) was advised. Salmonella Richmond is rare in Australia, is non-endemic and not recognised as rampant.

For more information, contact Ann Naco, Editor, *Food Surveillance Australia and New Zealand Newsletter*—Autumn/Winter 2005, Tel: (02) 6271 2227

Email: ann.naco@foodstandards.gov.au

Microbiological quality of cooked chicken meat

The Western Australian Food Monitoring Program recently released its report on the microbiological quality of cooked chicken meat. Ninety-four samples were taken from wholesalers, manufacturers and retail food outlets across Perth in late 2003.

The survey investigated levels of contamination by *Listeria monocytogenes* in cooked chicken products and looked at general microbiological parameters.

Results indicated a significant level of non-compliance with the microbiological guidelines. *Listeria monocytogenes* was present in 41 per cent of samples. Products kept above 60°C had no *Listeria monocytogenes*. Many products surveyed were unsuitable, while some were unfit for consumption.

Manufacturers and retailers must ensure that temperature controls and cross-contamination issues are managed to ensure safe food is produced.

For more information, contact James Harcombe, A/Food Scientist, WA Department of Health, Tel: (08) 9388 4926.

Food safety resources

Food safety—in your language

If you're looking for the latest food safety tips, the Food Safety Unit website www.health.vic.gov.au/foodsafety makes it easy to get the facts in your preferred language.



The Homepage navigation buttons on the left-hand side of the screen direct you to the 'In your language' web page that lists all translated documents that can be downloaded from the Food Safety Unit website.

The 'At home and shopping' webpage includes food safety tips for home and shopping in English and 23 other languages.

Your guide to food safety, a fact sheet with tips on keeping food safe in your home, has been translated in 23 languages.

The factsheet is available in Albanian, Arabic, Assyrian, Cambodian, Chinese, Croatian, Farsi, Greek, Hungarian, Indonesian, Italian, Japanese, Macedonian, Maltese, Polish, Portuguese, Russian, Serbian, Sinhalese, Somali, Spanish, Turkish and Vietnamese.

Food Safety Program supplements

Translated versions of the Department of Human Services Food Safety Program Template Supplements are also available:

- Supplement A. Kebabs—available in Arabic, Greek and Turkish.
- Supplement B. Sushi—available in Cambodian, Chinese, Korean, Japanese, Thai and Vietnamese.
- Supplement C. Chinese style meats—available in Cambodian, Chinese, Korean, Japanese, Thai and Vietnamese.

To download copies go to www.health.vic.gov.au/foodsafety/templates.htm

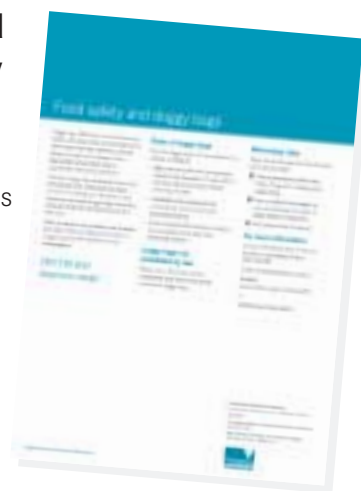
Supplements in print

Supplements for Kebabs, Sushi and Chinese style meats are now incorporated into the new printed version of the *Food Safety Program Template for retail and food service businesses, Edition 1.1* (April 2005 reprint). The template is available from Information Victoria for \$25.00 plus \$6.80 postage and handling. Phone 1300 366 356.



The word on doggy bags

A new factsheet tells of the risks associated with taking the 'doggy bag' of food home from the restaurant and sets out what food businesses can do to reduce those risks. For your copy go to the Food Safety website www.health.vic.gov.au/foodsafety/donating_food.htm



Website updates

Food Safety Supervisor training providers

The upgraded **Supervisor requirements** webpage now contains a table showing the minimum competency standards for specific food sectors with links to the National Training Information Service (NTIS) and lists of training providers.

Check it out at: www.health.vic.gov.au/foodsafety/fss.htm

List of templates

The list of registered Food Safety Program Templates has been updated and is available on the Food Safety website at: www.health.vic.gov.au/foodsafety/templates.htm

Registered auditors

The list of registered Food Safety Auditors has also been updated and is available on the Food Safety website at: www.health.vic.gov.au/foodsafety/auditing.htm

Food safety on the go!

The following is a brief update on a range of food safety projects in progress. For more information, contact the Food Safety Unit on 1300 364 352 or email foodsafety@dhs.vic.gov.au

Authorised Officer workforce development

- Completion of the project to identify current and future workforce issues facing Authorised Officers and issues relating to enforcing the Food Act.
- Continuing professional development program for Authorised Officers to enhance food safety enforcement skills and knowledge.

Working with CALD businesses

Continuing professional development workshops for Environmental Health Officers working with culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) food businesses.

Food safety assessment tool professional development

Continuing delivery of a training syllabus to assist Environmental Health Officers to effectively use the Australian Institute of Environmental Health Food Safety Assessment tool to compliance check standard food safety programs.

Food Safety Supervisor requirement evaluation

Continuing project to identify the differences in understanding of the competencies required by Food Safety Supervisors, and identify barriers and enablers for food businesses to meet the Food Safety Supervisor requirement of the Food Act.

Model policies and procedures

- Development of model policy on enforcement and prosecutions for use by local councils.
- Development of model policy for temporary premises registration and procedures for use by local councils.

Food businesses and intermediaries communications strategy

Development of a framework and priorities for communications activities to food businesses and intermediaries.

Consumer communications strategy

Development of a framework and priorities to raise consumer awareness of key food safety messages.

FoodSmart upgrade

Improvement to the look and functionality of FoodSmart, the online Food Safety Program Template.

Soft cheese challenge testing

Finalisation of testing program to identify pathogenic micro-organism growth in soft cheese at a range of storage temperatures.

New Food Safety website and email address

The Food Safety Unit has a new website and email address:

Website:

www.health.vic.gov.au/foodsafety

Email:

foodsafety@dhs.vic.gov.au

Food for thought—What's the beef

University of Maryland researchers believe new tissue engineering technology might be able to produce beef that is healthier for consumers and cut down on pollution produced by factory farming. They believe they could grow cells from the muscle tissue of cattle in large flat sheets on thin membranes.

Source: DHS News Notes, 25 August 2005

Spreading the food safety message

The Department of Human Services Food Safety Unit was one of 300 exhibitors at this year's Good Food and Wine Show held at the Melbourne Exhibition Centre over the weekend of 17-19 June 2005.

More than 24,500 people came through the doors to see cooking demonstrations and the latest kitchen appliances, explore new tastes and discover culinary trends from around the world.

With the focus on quality and diversity in food, the show provided a great venue to spread the word about food safety in the home. The display also promoted healthy food choices and nutrition under 'Go for your life', the Victorian



The Food Safety Unit's Violette Lazanas pointing out the safe fridge temperature range.

Government's community campaign promoting healthier lifestyles. The food safety display highlighted awareness of the temperature danger zone and

thousands of fridge thermometers and magnets were handed out. The handy booklet, *Your guide to food safety* also proved popular.

Your contributions

Victorian Food Safety News is a journal focusing on news in the food and food safety industry. We welcome your input. If you have any comments or stories of interest, please contact Roger Pierotti on (03) 9637 4095 or via email at roger.pierotti@dhs.vic.gov.au. Please note that articles or information provided may be edited.

Victorian Food Safety News

Published by Food Safety Unit,
Victorian Government Department of Human
Services Melbourne Victoria.

September 2005

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Services, 2005

Authorised by the State Government of Victoria,
120 Spencer Street, Melbourne.

Printed by Snap Printing, 673 Spencer St,
West Melbourne.

Accredited online training

The City of Melbourne has recently launched an accredited online course that will certify participants as a Food Safety Supervisor under the Victorian *Food Act 1984*.

The new Online Food Safety Course for Food Handlers provides a flexible and effective way for busy food handlers to access the latest training in food hygiene and food safety. It offers an in-depth look at food safety, allowing food handlers to learn in their own environment, at their own pace and in their own way.

The course provides entry-level training and is open to everyone, whether working in the food industry or not. There are no prerequisites for entry. The course covers

six topics and an assessment and provides reference materials, on screen instructions, a course participant handbook, website links and fact sheets.

Training is critical to ensure that food handlers understand their role in providing safe food to customers. The Online Food Safety Course for Food Handlers is an ideal course for people looking to work in the food industry, start their own business or update their skills and knowledge.

For more information, visit www.melbourne.vic.gov.au/foodsafetytraining or call Food Safety Training and Consulting on (03) 9658 8817.