

# Victorian Food Safety News

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## Introducing *Victorian Food Safety News*

Welcome to the first edition of *Victorian Food Safety News*.

The Department of Human Services Food Safety Unit is pleased to introduce this news journal for the food and food safety industry. *Victorian Food Safety News* will highlight developments, projects, initiatives and best practice examples in food safety. It also attempts to raise the profile and strategic importance of food safety.

Food and food production is a cornerstone of the Victorian economy. The Victorian Government's economic statement, *Victoria: leading the way*, features food-related initiatives such as redeveloping the Melbourne Wholesale Markets, building better supply chain links, leading the way in major events and conventions such as the Melbourne Food and Wine Festival, and activating the Next Generation Food Strategy.

Food safety and public health are essential to an effective and productive community and a prosperous economy. The reputation of Victoria's food depends greatly on the community's and market's confidence in food safety and quality.

This first edition focuses on the activities of the department's Food Safety Unit. It reports on projects and developments that have an impact on the food industry.

With your support, future editions will feature contributions from a wide range of people and organisations in the food industry. We see *Victorian Food Safety News* as an opportunity to promote developments and successes in food safety from across the industry.

We look forward to your contributions and ideas.

## Pork roll project focuses on education

A partnership between the Department of Human Services and several municipal councils is resulting in safer products for consumers.

In response to outbreaks of food poisoning attributed to pork rolls over the past few years, the Food Safety Unit developed a program to raise awareness and understanding among food businesses of the procedures to ensure safe pork roll production. The project began in November 2003 and ran until the end of April 2004. It was

implemented by municipal councils with the support of the Department of Human Services regional offices and the Food Safety Unit.

Through the project, environmental health officers in the cities of Greater Dandenong, Maribyrnong, Brimbank, Yarra, Melbourne, Knox and Monash visited food premises at least weekly and worked closely with them to improve their food safety knowledge and practices. They approached this in a

*Continued on page 2*



## Pork roll project focuses on education (continued)



*City of Maribyrnong's Sandee Paterson, with a local shop owner discussing pork roll preparation.*

number of ways—through information, education and sampling.

The environmental health officers were given a questionnaire to use with businesses to highlight issues specific to pork roll production, such as food handling and storage, cooking methods and ingredients used. The questionnaire also raises general issues around Food Safety Programs, how they are implemented, and the benefits of staff training.

**‘The one-on-one approach means that we can address relevant issues, provide step-by-step education and give practical tips on the spot’**

The Food Safety Unit also provided councils with translated information for proprietors. This included a poster *Guide to safe pork roll production* in Vietnamese, which has proved popular as a quick and easy reference.

Sampling was timed to occur over the hottest months of the year, when temperature can easily affect food safety. Environmental health officers visited premises at least weekly, usually on Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays and on days when the temperature reached

over 28°C. At each of the premises, five to six samples were taken including samples of pate, egg butter and one of either vegetables or meat products.

Feedback from councils and businesses suggests that an important aspect of the project has been the regular visits to shops—spending the time to develop relationships between shop owners, staff and council officers. ‘The one-on-one approach means that we can address relevant issues, provide step-by-step education and give practical tips on the spot,’ said Sandee Paterson, Environmental Health Officer from the City of Maribyrnong. ‘This approach is particularly effective when working with people with limited English. It means we can ensure that businesses understand the information they receive,’ she added.

Kelly Boulton, from the Food Safety Unit, agrees that the regular visits have been valuable. ‘The weekly meetings have not only provided useful information, they have reinforced the message about safe food handling, food hygiene, storage and production and have enabled environmental health officers and businesses to develop productive and supportive relationships,’ she said.

‘The sampling has been used largely as an education and measuring tool, rather

than focusing on enforcement. When we tell businesses that their results are positive this gives them confidence in their growing knowledge and ability. You can see the pride they feel in achieving good results,’ said Sandee Paterson.

So far the environmental health officers have reported excellent feedback from businesses. They have also enjoyed the opportunity to meet with officers from other councils and share their experiences.

Sandee Paterson is keen to see the project continue. ‘This project has added to the City of Maribyrnong’s comprehensive approach to food safety, which includes training and resources designed for Vietnamese shop owners and staff. It has enabled our officers to spend more time with these businesses to improve food safety practices,’ she said.

With the completion of the project in April 2004, council officers have been providing additional feedback to the Food Safety Unit. A project report will be produced in the coming months. Watch this space for an update!



*Vietnamese ‘Guide to safe pork roll production’ poster used with food businesses*

## New food safety modules adopt traditional Asian recipes

The Department of Human Services Food Safety Program templates now include modules that recognise the benefits of traditional food preparation and storage and allow food businesses to display and keep certain foods out of the standard temperature control range.

Sushi products and Asian meats are potentially hazardous because of their ingredients—such as raw fish; and the way they are displayed—in restaurant windows. However, these foods have been prepared and displayed this way for many years without causing known food poisoning incidents.

Research and microbiological testing has shown that these foods can be safely kept under conditions that are in the temperature danger zone (5°C to 60°C) as long as they are prepared and stored using traditional recipes and processes.

As a result, new modules have been developed for the Department of Human Services 'Food Safety Program Template for Retail and Food Service Businesses' and 'Foodsmart', the Internet-based template.

### new modules acknowledge and encourage traditional food preparation methods where these are proven to be safe

Kelly Boulton, from the department's Food Safety Unit, says the new modules acknowledge and encourage traditional food preparation methods where these are proven to be safe. 'Traditional methods of Asian cooking and storage expose food businesses to breaches of standard food safety requirements because they involve alternative methods of temperature control. The new food safety modules are based on research that shows that these cultural practices can be safe.'

Nori Rolls and Nigiri pieces are traditionally prepared using vinegar with



*Preparing Peking duck.*

the rice, which lowers the pH of the rice and, as the rice is wrapped around or tied to the raw ingredients, it protects against microbial growth. The new food safety modules relating to Sushi products recommend the volumes of vinegar and rice needed to allow Nigiri pieces to be kept at 15°C for up to eight hours and Nori Rolls to be kept at 15°C for up to 12 hours.

Traditional methods used to prepare Asian meats, such as Peking duck, chicken and pork, should keep the products safe within the temperature danger zone for extended periods.

Peking duck, for instance, is dipped in a mixture of vinegar and salt that affects the pH and water activity of the skin and provides a protective barrier around the duck.

The new food safety modules for Asian meats give proprietors the opportunity to display meats at ambient temperatures for extended periods, as long as they satisfy criteria relating to ingredients, preparation, cooking, drying and display. For example, if all of the criteria in the new modules are satisfied, ducks and chickens can be left on display at

ambient temperatures for 22 hours and pork for 7 hours.

'As a range of different foods become more widely produced and available, it is important to ensure that all food proprietors are following the traditional methods to ensure food safety. The new modules describe the traditional methods and set criteria to ensure compliance with food safety standards,' said Kelly Boulton.



*Peking duck—dipped in a mixture of vinegar and salt that provides a protective barrier around the duck.*

The new modules are available in Foodsmart at [www.foodsmart.vic.gov.au](http://www.foodsmart.vic.gov.au)—just select the questions specific to these foods. A template supplement containing the new modules is also available for download from the website [www.foodsafety.vic.gov.au](http://www.foodsafety.vic.gov.au) or by contacting the Food Safety Unit on 1300 364 352 for a free copy.

## Atlas of ready-to-eat foods

The Food Safety Unit has recently released the 2nd edition of the *Atlas of ready-to-eat foods*. The Atlas provides environmental health officers with a useful reference tool to assess the risks associated with various ready-to-eat foods from different cultures that are stored at ambient temperatures.

Many familiar foods have known risk factors due to the composition, mode of manufacture, storage or preparation. Less is known about other foods. The Atlas classifies the risk of various foods from different cultures.

The Food Safety Unit, in conjunction with the Microbiological Diagnostic Unit at the University of Melbourne, determined a risk rating for each food assessed as either high, medium or low.

The 2nd edition of the atlas is an 'access database' of some 65 ready-to-eat foods on a CD. It has been distributed to all Victorian municipal councils for use by environmental health officers.

For more information contact Michael West on (03) 9637 4093 or email [michael.west@dhs.vic.gov.au](mailto:michael.west@dhs.vic.gov.au).



*Atlas of ready-to-eat foods, Version 2 CD.*

## Templates make Food Safety Programs simple

A Food Safety Program template is a prescriptive document that businesses can customise to produce a standard Food Safety Program that meets the requirements of section 19D of the *Food Act 1984*. It sets out the steps that a business needs to take to make sure that the food they prepare and sell is safe. By following the instructions in the template, a food business can create a Food Safety Program that is relevant to them.

Most businesses, other than those classified as Class 1 that handle and/or sell food to the very young, the elderly and the sick, can choose to develop their own Food Safety Program using a registered template. Alternatively, they can use an independently developed and audited Food Safety Program.

Businesses that use a registered template must have their Food Safety Program checked by their local council to confirm that it complies with legislation.

Registered templates have been developed by industry associations, individual businesses and the Department of Human Services, to suit food safety requirements and issues that differ from industry to industry.

All templates are rigorously assessed before they are registered by the Department of Human Services. This includes examination by a Technical Review Body and a Template Assessment Panel. Registered templates are reviewed and re-registered annually.

Organisations and individuals considering developing and registering food safety templates must first advise the department's Food Safety Unit, which can supply a *Template Assessment Checklist* that provides a framework to ensure consistency and suitability across all registered templates.

Watch this space in future editions for an update on new and amended templates.

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## Cultural workshops improve communication

Recent training workshops have assisted environmental health officers to communicate more effectively and build stronger relationships with people from different cultural and language groups working in the food sector.

The Department of Human Services Food Safety Unit engaged the National Centre for Gender and Cultural Diversity at Swinburne University to conduct professional development workshops for municipal environmental health officers.

This training explored ways of working effectively with culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) food businesses. The main objective of the workshops was to increase the effectiveness of inter-cultural communication between environmental health officers and food handlers through understanding cultural

difference and practising inter-cultural skills.

The university also conducted research into the inter-cultural aspects of the work of environmental health officers. The information gathered will inform future policy and professional development programs.

One-day professional development sessions, supported by the Australian Institute of Environmental Health, were held at 12 locations throughout the state from April to June 2004. This included six sessions in metropolitan Melbourne and other sessions in Ballarat, Bendigo, Camperdown, Horsham, Shepparton and Traralgon. In all, some 200 environmental health officers attended these workshops and upgraded their knowledge of dealing with cultural differences.

## Study shows how to keep home deliveries cool and safe

Simple packing and storing methods can reduce the need for refrigeration of food packed for home delivery and ensure that home delivery services are convenient and safe, a recent study identified.

The study across three states highlights food safety issues in relation to home delivery services, provides valuable information for service providers and gives health authorities a scientific basis for developing controls to reduce food safety risks.

Home delivery of food has, for many years, been an important service for people without access to cars, those who are frail or aged and people with disabilities. Demand for these services is expected to rise as the elderly population living independently in the community grows. Increasingly, home delivery is also being provided as a service of convenience as the use of 'on-line' shopping gathers momentum.



*Swinburne University National Centre for Gender and Cultural Diversity's Helen McKernan leads a group of municipal environmental health officers in the training workshop.*

The home delivery service generally runs like this—orders are taken or food is selected by the consumer, food is packed from the shelf into bags and these are placed on trolleys awaiting pick up by a contracted courier and delivery to the home. In most cases, there is no chilling or refrigeration of the packed food and the time from packing to delivery can extend to more than five hours.

Clearly these practices raise issues for the safe handling, storage and delivery of perishable foods. The National Food Safety Standards (Chapter 3 of the *Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code*) allow perishable food to be outside temperature control providing the food business can demonstrate that food safety has not been compromised (Standard 3.2.2 25 (d) Alternative methods of compliance).

To understand the safety issues and inform the industry of implications for delivery methods, the Microbiological Diagnostic Unit at the University of Melbourne undertook a study of nine supermarkets in Victoria, Queensland and the Northern Territory. Funded by the Victorian Department of Human Services, the study identified risks posed by unrefrigerated delivery of perishable foods and presented findings that will help organisations formulate food safety programs. The research may also contribute to the development of uniform transport requirements across the nation.

The study monitored the temperatures of eight foods; cheese, fish, fruit, milk, mince, pie, deli meat and peas, from the time they were selected from the shelf until they were delivered to the customer.

While the findings show that for most foods non-refrigerated delivery did not appear to increase the food safety risk, some foods did record a significant rise in temperature and therefore pose an increased risk of food poisoning.

The general recommendations for food delivery are:

- Refrigerating packed foods or using cold packs is effective in limiting temperature rises and also allows stores to extend the time from packing to delivery to up to 24 hours if the final temperature does not exceed 10°C.
- If foods are not refrigerated after they are packed, they should be:
  - packed appropriately
  - kept on storage trolleys in the coolest part of the store
  - placed away from heat sources and from windows exposed to the sun
  - delivered within four hours.
- Refrigerated delivery vehicles are not necessary if stores can ensure that:
  - foods are kept as cool as possible
  - the time spent on the road is kept under 30 minutes.

The Food Safety Unit is working in consultation with the Australian Retailers Association of Victoria, Northern Territory Health and Queensland Health to develop guidelines for home delivery of perishable foods.

For more information contact Gary Smith, Food Safety Unit on (03) 9637 4211 or email [gary.smith@dhs.vic.gov.au](mailto:gary.smith@dhs.vic.gov.au).

### Food for thought— Hot food

A US man is suing a fast-food chain because he claims to have suffered physical disability after biting a hot chicken burger. He claims that the company should give customers fair warning about the temperature of its hot foods.

*Source: Department of Human Services, NewsNotes 20 April 2004*

## Food sampling across Victoria

### New committee promotes collaboration

Established to improve collaboration on statewide food sampling activities, the Victorian Food Sampling Committee has representatives from municipal councils, the Municipal Association of Victoria, food and microbial testing laboratories, OZFoodnet, and the Department of Human Services.

The committee's role is to identify food sampling activities of strategic importance and seek collaboration in conducting surveys across the state.

In Victoria, municipal councils are primarily responsible for food sampling and analysis, and each year more than 10,000 samples are submitted for analysis. Food sampling surveys and laboratory testing assess compliance of foods and practices with standards and codes; investigate potential contamination; and assess risks resulting from exposing foods to introduced contaminants.

The Food Sampling Committee was established to improve collaboration of

food sampling activities at the state, regional and local levels. Better collaboration and use of resources will ensure a more efficient food sampling regime.

'Statewide surveys instigated by the committee aim to tackle statewide issues and build knowledge of key strategic foods and practices,' said Victor DiPaola, the Committee's Chair. 'They will complement the existing work of local and regional authorities.'

This work will help identify emerging issues and increase our understanding of the risks associated with foods and practices. Statewide sampling will also provide sufficient sample numbers to produce valid reporting.

Food sampling projects carried out under the auspice of the committee must:

- have statewide or national significance
- focus on public health and safety or deceptive and misleading practices
- have defined objectives and address specific problems relating to the issue
- draw on available intelligence
- identify possible outcomes
- follow correct sampling procedure
- not unnecessarily duplicate earlier reported sampling surveys.

The committee has developed a framework that sets out a process for identifying and prioritising food sampling surveys. Interested municipal councils, laboratories, regional environment health officers and other departmental staff can submit proposals for statewide food sampling surveys to the committee. Once the committee has endorsed the survey objectives, sampling details, analysis methodology and procedures, this information will be provided to participating councils to collect and process the relevant samples.

### Food for thought— Wet between the ears

Concerned city officials in the US state of California were planning to ban foam cups after learning that the chemical dihydrogen monoxide was used in their production. Then the red-faced officials learned that the substance, or H<sub>2</sub>O for short, is the scientific term for water. They blamed slap-dash research by a paralegal, who believed information on an official-looking website that described dihydrogen monoxide as 'an odorless, tasteless chemical' that can be deadly if inhaled.

*Source: Department of Human Services, NewsNotes 20 April 2004*

### Freshly squeezed juices— the first survey

The first statewide food sampling survey, focusing on freshly squeezed juices, is in progress. The purpose of the survey is to improve knowledge and understanding of the microbiological risk of freshly squeezed fruit and vegetable juices, which are increasingly popular products.

Municipal environmental health officers have collected around 250 samples from retail businesses that squeeze juice on site, including major retail juice bars, take-aways, restaurants, sandwich bars, health food shops and greengrocers. The samples were collected from March to May 2004, and detailed analysis of the samples is being conducted over the next few months.

For more information check the Victorian Food Information Network (VICFIN) at <https://at.dhs.vic.gov.au/vicfin> Contact Paul Goldsmith, Food Safety Unit, (03) 9637 4943 or email [paul.goldsmith@dhs.vic.gov.au](mailto:paul.goldsmith@dhs.vic.gov.au)



*The survey is improving knowledge and understanding of the microbiological risk of freshly squeezed fruit and vegetable juices.*

## Kebabs need a kill step

A statewide survey of spits used for making kebabs has highlighted the need to add a kill step to the cooking process.

Almost 90 per cent of samples in the survey had an internal temperature of less than 75°C, which poses a risk of cross-contamination between raw and cooked meat. The kill step would reduce this risk and ensure that the meat is safe.

A statewide survey of spits used for making kebabs has highlighted the need to add a kill step to the cooking process.

Kebabs are a traditional middle eastern dish of layers of chicken, beef or lamb cooked on a skewer that rotates in front of a heat source. As the outer layer of meat is cooked, it is carved off in slices and served with salad and dips on bread.

In response to a number of cases of illness that appeared to be linked to eating kebabs, the Department of Human Services Senior Medical Adviser



Meat from rotating spits requires a kill step before serving to customers.

The results of the survey included:

- Chicken—6% of the samples failed, being detected with E.coli.
- Lamb—9% of the samples failed, two had E.coli, one Clostridium pefringens.
- Beef—all samples passed.
- Almost 90 per cent of kebabs sampled had a deep internal temperature of less than 75°C, which poses a risk of cross-contamination between raw and cooked meat.
- Less than two-thirds of the meat kebabs reached a surface temperature of more than 75°C.
- More than half (65 per cent) of the businesses sampled do not cook meat after it has been sliced from the spit and before it is served.
- Pink or raw meat was cut from spits in 23% of premises.
- Eighty per cent of proprietors discarded the leftover meat.

instigated a survey. The survey involved 31 businesses and aimed to:

- determine the current range of processes in the kebab industry
- determine if further cooking steps are needed
- if required, issue a directive to introduce a kill step after the meat has been cut off the spit and before serving.

Municipal environmental health officers took 76 samples of cooked meat from vertical spits and 12 from drip trays from randomly selected businesses. The environmental health officers also completed a questionnaire for each premises to identify and record critical control points, being the internal and surface temperature of the meat on the spit, whether the meat is subsequently cooked before serving, what happens to leftover meat from the spit and any observation of pink or raw meat being cut. The samples were submitted to a NATA registered public analyst for analysis.

The survey results led to the following recommendations to help businesses ensure the safe production of kebabs:

- Use thinner cuts of meats on the spit to ensure it reaches temperatures above 75°C.
- Measure internal temperature of the meat with a probe thermometer.
- Introduce a kill step—to further cook meat on the hot plate before serving to destroy bacteria.

### Food for thought— Going fruit loopy

An Austrian farmer has been threatened with jail because he sold marmalade made from apricots instead of citrus fruits. The farmer was fined after trading standards inspectors found him selling the apricot marmalade which he made using his grandmother's recipe. According to a European Union ruling, marmalade can contain only citrus fruits. With other ingredients, it has to be labelled as jam.

Source: Department of Human Services, NewsNotes, 20 November 2003

## When a meat pie isn't a meat pie

A survey of meat pies has found that not all of them meet the standard.

The *Australian New Zealand Food Standards Code Volume 2* defines a meat pie as a pie 'containing no less than 250g/kg of meat'. 'Meat' is defined as 'the whole or part of the carcass of any buffalo, camel, cattle, deer, goat, horse, pig, poultry, rabbit or sheep'.

In response to concerns about the content and labelling of meat pies, the Department of Human Services Food Safety Unit submitted 30 samples of meat pies for analysis.

Samples included:

- generic—no name brands
- supermarket brands
- major brands 'premium product'
- regional major brands 'premium product'
- franchise bakery products
- small individual bakery product

Three pies of each brand were included to ensure a representative composite sample for analysis.

The survey results revealed that several samples did not comply with the relevant standards. The Food Standards Code is breached if a product is labelled as a 'meat pie' when the meat content of the pie is less than 250g/kg.

The Code also requires the percentage characterising ingredient to be stated in the label, generally following the declaration of meat in the list of ingredients. The format 'meat (minimum 25 per cent)' is often employed. A declaration less than 25 per cent means the product cannot be represented as a meat pie.

Meat pies can also contain non-meat proteins added as binders, to improve texture and flavour and retain water or fat. Soy protein is usually the non-meat protein of choice and is often added to meat pies. It is cheaper than meat, has a similar mouth feel and appearance to meat and is low in fat so allows the use of higher fat, lower quality, meat cuts.

The list of ingredients must include all the ingredients in descending order by weight. Soy protein must be included in the list where it is used.

The research conducted in 2003, required the development of new testing methodologies to identify whether Soy protein was substituted for meat protein. No substitution was discovered.

The Food Safety Unit has contacted all of the manufacturers that produced pies with less than 25 per cent meat, advising them to review their recipes and make

Analysis of the 30 pies showed that:

- 40% complied with the minimum meat requirement (250g/kg) after correction for non-meat protein.
- 60% complied with the minimum meat requirement before correction for Soy protein.
- The presence of Soy protein, or a form of Soy protein, was declared in the list of ingredients in all instances where it was detected.
- Eight samples did not comply with the % characterising ingredient labelling requirement of the Food Standards Code by not including the meat percentage on the label.
- Two samples represented as meat pies had less than the minimum 25 per cent meat content, declaring only around 20 per cent meat.

necessary corrections. They were also advised that samples of their products might be taken at a later date to verify that their products were complying with the Code.

For more information contact Gary Smith, Food Safety Unit on (03) 9637 4211 or email [gary.smith@dhs.vic.gov.au](mailto:gary.smith@dhs.vic.gov.au)

## Food Safety at the Good Food and Wine 2004 Show

Held over the Queen's Birthday long weekend, 12 to 14 June, the Good Food and Wine Show 2004 showcased a range of food related activities to thousands of consumers at the Melbourne Exhibition Centre. The Food Safety Unit used this event to spread the word about food safety matters.

Featuring a new consumer booklet '*Your guide to food safety*' and a new theme 'Enjoy your food, don't let it turn nasty,' the food safety display aimed to increase consumer awareness of food safety

issues. Key messages of the display focused on raising awareness of the temperature danger zone, high-risk foods and personal hygiene. Along with the booklet, a fridge magnet providing information about the temperature danger zone was also given out. It is envisaged that the theme and the materials in this display will be used in future displays and promotions across the state.

For more information contact Roger Pierotti, (03) 9637 4095 or email [roger.pierotti@dhs.vic.gov.au](mailto:roger.pierotti@dhs.vic.gov.au).



Environmental Health Officers Karissa Walker and Briony Cooper with Roger Pierotti at the food safety stand.

## Setting food standards for Australia and New Zealand

Australia and New Zealand have a cooperative food regulatory system that involves national and state governments in implementing and enforcing uniform food standards. This system came into full effect on 1 July 2002, following an extensive reform program designed to ensure a coordinated and effective approach to food regulation in the two countries.

The *Food Regulation Agreement*, signed in November 2000, commits the Australian Government, states and territories to a cooperative national system of food regulation and the *Australia New Zealand Joint Food Standards Agreement* allows for New Zealand's involvement.

### The Ministerial Council

The Australia New Zealand Food Regulation Ministerial Council develops food regulatory policy. This council comprises the health ministers of the Australian Government, states and territories and the New Zealand Government. They are joined by ministers from other relevant portfolios, such as agriculture and consumer affairs, and a local government representative, to ensure a whole-of-

food-chain approach to food safety regulation.

The ministerial council also develops policy guidelines for setting domestic food standards and accepts, amends or rejects standards.

The council receives advice from the Food Regulation Standing Committee (FRSC), a committee of senior officials from the Australian and New Zealand governments, states and territories and a member of the Australian Local Government Association.

Each year the ministerial council lists the policy issues, projects and reviews for consideration by the Food Regulation Standing Committee.

### Food Standards Australia New Zealand

The *Food Standards Australia New Zealand Act 1991* establishes Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) as the independent authority that develops food standards in line with policy established by the ministerial council.

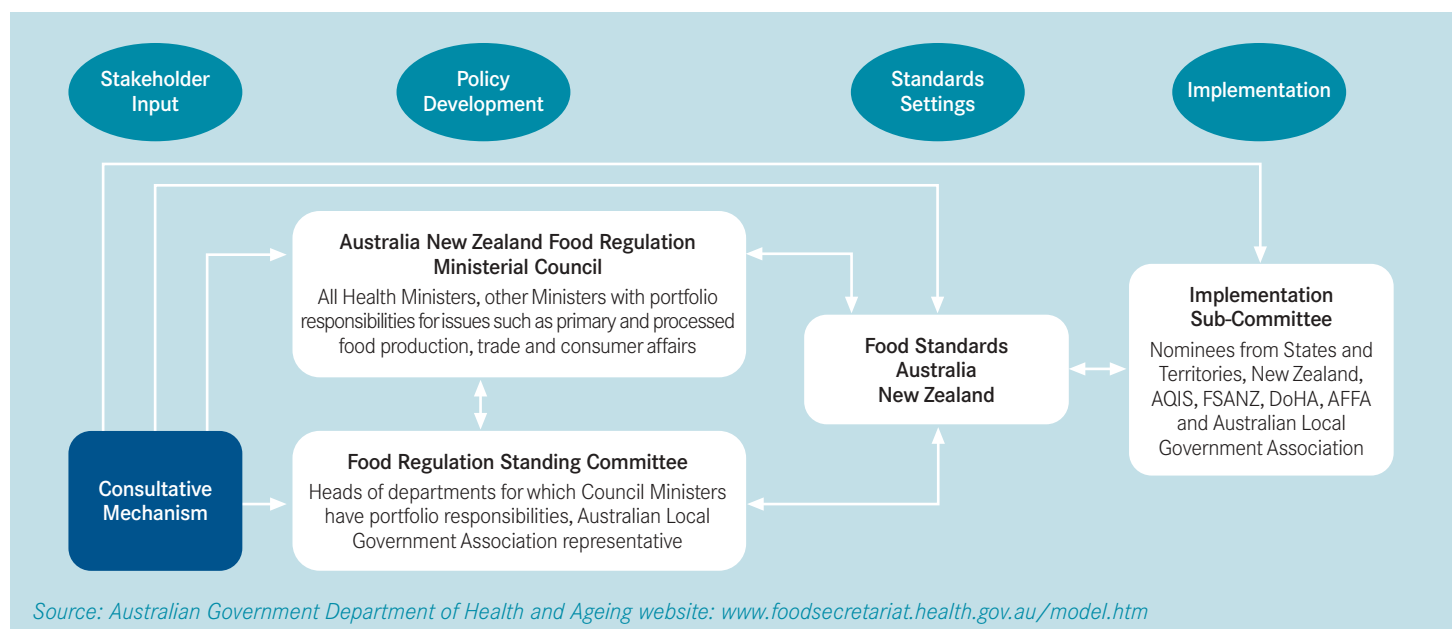
Food Standards Australia New Zealand maintains the *Food Standards Code*, which is a collection of individual food standards relating to the food supply chain, from primary production through

to manufactured food and retail outlets. These food standards have the force of law, making it an offence to supply food that does not comply.

Food Standards Australia New Zealand also develops and varies food standards following applications from agencies and bodies or as a result of its own initiatives.

Consultation is vital to policy and standards development. Draft policies and initial and draft assessments of applications for changes to food standards are published for comment. Decisions around food standards and policies consider advice from government agencies, input from stakeholders and submissions from the public. Decisions on food standards are open and accountable and based on rigorous scientific assessment of any risk to public health and safety.

For more information on food regulation policies, processes, committees and ministerial councils, visit the National Food Regulation Secretariat website at [www.foodsecretariat.health.gov.au](http://www.foodsecretariat.health.gov.au). Also visit the Food Standards Australia New Zealand website at [www.foodstandards.gov.au](http://www.foodstandards.gov.au) for information on food standards and codes.



## Tracking down clusters of illness

Investigating sources of illness in the community is an ongoing and everyday task for the Department of Human Services Public Health Group.

Such investigations are usually initiated in response to analytical laboratories notifying the department of illnesses or pathogens they have discovered through tests ordered by general practitioners and hospitals. Laboratories are required by law to notify the Department of Human Services if their analyses indicate certain pathogens.

Investigations can also be initiated when the department identifies trends in pathogens recorded. 'The department has extensive archives going back decades that enable it to identify trends or unusual spikes in records. In response to these spikes or trends, the department may begin an investigation,' explained Victor Di Paola of the Food Safety Unit.

As part of an investigation, all people with the illness are interviewed and their food history is tracked in an attempt to identify foods common to them all. This information can lead to the identification of an outbreak of food poisoning.

Where clusters of illness are investigated, the department communicates with authorities in other states to inform them and to work with them to identify nationwide issues.

The results of an investigation may require a business to conduct a food recall, close down and clean up, or face prosecution—all of which is at the expense of the business.

These investigations and notifications can also instigate food sampling surveys.



*Specimens being analysed at a microbial laboratory.*

### Investigating and identifying an outbreak— a brief case study

In early 2003, a Melbourne hospital notified the Department of Human Services that four people who presented to their emergency department on that day with gastroenteritis symptoms had all eaten food from the same take away restaurant.

The department advised hospitals, local doctors and environmental health officers of a possible outbreak and asked them to report any suspected cases.

Suspected cases were interviewed and faecal specimens from the patients and from the food handlers at the restaurant were analysed by the Microbiological Diagnostic Unit at the University of Melbourne.

On the next day, staff from the department's Communicable Diseases Section and Food Safety Unit, the Microbiological Diagnostic Unit and local environmental health officers visited the site. Immediate actions included closing the restaurant, checking food preparation procedures, analysing food samples and supervising a clean up of the premises.

The extent of the outbreak was significant. A total of 262 cases of gastroenteritis linked to the food from the restaurant were reported. Of these, 243 were interviewed and *Salmonella* Typhimurium 135 was isolated from a faecal specimen for 125 of this group as well as from two food handlers.

The premises remained closed for several weeks. Before opening, the proprietor installed new equipment and amended food safety plans. The proprietor discontinued sales of high-risk cold foods and a second food safety supervisor was trained. All staff were required to submit a negative faecal specimen before they could return to work. The restaurant proprietors were also fined \$100,000 for breaches of the Food Act.

This outbreak was the fifth in eight years to be associated with pork rolls. It reinforced the risks of cross-contamination and inadequate temperature control and highlighted the need for food safety training for all staff.

*(Source: Department of Human Services, Victorian Infectious Diseases Bulletin, Vol 6, Issue 2, June 2003)*

## Food safety on the go!

The following is a brief update on a range of food safety projects.

For more information, contact the Food Safety Unit on 1300 364 352 or email [fsv@dhs.vic.gov.au](mailto:fsv@dhs.vic.gov.au).

Project	Due
<b>Auditors handbook</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Stakeholder consultation on the revision of the Department of Human Services <i>Auditors handbook</i></li> </ul>	mid 2004
<b>Evaluation of food safety information to CALD food businesses</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A study into the effectiveness of food safety information for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) food businesses.</li> </ul>	mid 2004
<b>Evaluation of 'speaking' Foodsmart</b>	mid 2004
<b>Food handling practices of Victorian food businesses</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Follow up study to the benchmarking conducted in 2001.</li> </ul>	mid 2004
<b>Guidelines for food businesses that have a non-potable water supply</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consultation on the development of guidelines for food businesses on how to manage their water safety risks when they have a non-potable water supply.</li> </ul>	mid 2004
<b>Home delivery guide for supermarkets</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consultations with industry and stakeholders to develop a guide.</li> </ul>	late 2004
<b>Skills and knowledge of food handlers in Victorian food businesses</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Follow up study to the benchmarking conducted in 2001.</li> </ul>	mid 2004
<b>Surveys for chloropropanols and acrylamides in selected foods</b>	mid 2004
<b>Surveys of fruits and vegetables</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identifying the microbiological status of E. Coli, Salmonella, Listeria, Campylobacter, Yersinia and Clostridium (Garlic only) in ready-to-eat fruits and vegetables.</li> </ul>	mid 2004
<b>Surveys for mycotoxins in selected foods</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Aflatoxins in cereals, tree nuts, chilli products, peanuts and peanut products, milk products and imported sauces containing such foods.</li> <li>Fumonisin in maize, other cereals and lupins.</li> <li>Ochratoxins in wheat, barley, other cereals and seafood.</li> <li>Patulin in fruit and fruit juices.</li> </ul>	mid 2004
<b>2 hour/4 hour rule and the process temperature log</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Study into the use by food businesses of records in the Department of Human Services Food Safety Program templates.</li> </ul>	mid 2004
<b>Time and cost of keeping records</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Study into the time and costs of keeping records for the Department of Human Services Food Safety Program templates.</li> </ul>	mid 2004

## 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](mailto:roger.pierotti@dhs.vic.gov.au). Please note that articles or information provided may be edited.

## Are your details correct?

The Food Safety Unit has made all reasonable attempts to keep details of recipients of this newsletter up to date.

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### Food for thought— Nailing down a health problem

The US state of Mississippi is set to ban restaurant waitresses with long false fingernails after a woman told a US Senator her story of discovering a false fingernail in her bowl of soup. Under the Senator's bill, the state Health Department would regulate the wearing of false fingernails by restaurant employees who serve or prepare food.

*Source: Department of Human Services, NewsNotes 11 February 2004*

### Food for thought— Canned rodent

A French producer of canned vegetables has been ordered to pay compensation to a disgusted customer who tipped the contents of one of its products into her frying pan and a dead mouse plopped out. The woman took the company to court after it tried to limit its compensation to another can of food, a recipe book and a voucher to the value of the frypan.

*Source: Department of Human Services, NewsNotes 9 March 2004*

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