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| Vector-borne infectious disease control |
| Changes to the Public Health and Wellbeing Regulations from 14 December 2019 |

On 14 December 2019, the Public Health and Wellbeing Regulations 2019 (the regulations) replaced the Public Health and Wellbeing Regulations 2009. This information sheet provides an overview of changes that relate to vector-borne infectious disease control.

## Why regulate vector-borne infectious disease control?

Victoria regulates the control of mosquitoes and other disease vectors to prevent disease transmission to humans. Climate change, urban development and increased global travel are influencing the spread and distribution of disease-causing pathogens and disease vectors.

## What has changed in the regulations?

The new regulations will help reduce the risk of vector-borne infectious diseases by broadening the scope of the existing regulations. They allow for the control of emerging and potential vector-borne disease risks.

In summary, the changes include:

* replacing ‘arbovirus infection control’ with ‘vector-borne infectious disease control’ and broadening the scope of infectious disease control regulation to include other disease vectors, not just mosquitoes
* defining ‘disease vector’ so that an animal, including a bird or insect, can be the subject of infectious disease control
* establishing obligations on owners and occupiers of premises to take reasonable steps to control mosquito breeding grounds and abate conditions conducive to their establishment
* allowing an authorised officer to direct an owner or occupier of a premises to take steps to

control any mosquito breeding ground and control the adult mosquito population on the premises

* introducing a Chief Health Officer authority to issue a disease vector control notice to address a material public health risk caused by a disease vector
* allowing an authorised officer to direct an owner or occupier of a premises to control a disease vector (as specified in a disease vector control notice).

## Why have these changes been made?

The emergence of new vector-borne diseases, and the increase of existing diseases is expected. Mosquitoes and other disease vectors take advantage of numerous habitats across private and public land.

The previous regulations titled ‘Arbovirus infection control’ allowed directions to be given to remove conditions conducive to the breeding of mosquitoes, but did not manage the potential risk posed by mosquitoes across their lifecycle, nor the risk posed by other disease vectors. These limitations could potentially place the community at risk of transmission of infectious disease.

The changes will help prevent and minimise infectious diseases known to be caused by mosquitoes or other disease vectors. They also allow for a more rapid response to emerging and potential disease threats such as Dengue fever and Zika.

The control of disease vectors is the key approach in preventing vector-borne disease.

## What do the changes mean?

### Mosquito control

The new obligation on owners and occupiers of premises to control breeding grounds or abate conditions conducive to their establishment is based on taking reasonable steps to reduce risk.

This complements the existing non-regulatory measures to control mosquito breeding under the Victorian Arbovirus (mosquito-borne) Disease Control Program.

### Disease vector control

It is intended that the Chief Health Officer would use the disease vector control notice in limited circumstances and only if satisfied a material risk (substantial risk of harm) to public health exists from a disease vector. This means in instances where a transmission risk is known to be connected to a vector other than a mosquito, and transmission of the associated disease is actively occurring in the community.

The following framework will inform a disease vector control notice:

* Consideration of a range of evidence and information, such as:
  + - the presence of the vector in the community
    - the presence of disease-carrying organisms in the vector
    - knowledge of active transmission of disease in the community from that vector.
* Consultation with affected parties, including councils and communities, to inform:
  + - any disease vector control notice and various options to reduce the risk to public health
    - possible impacts on individuals, the community and the environment.

#### Components of a disease vector control notice

A disease vector control notice must:

* be issued in writing and specify the disease vector or vectors to which it relates; and
* specify the municipal district or districts to which it relates; and
  + specify control measures that may be required to reduce the risk to public health.

Control measures may include:

* the abatement of any conditions on premises conducive to any of the following:
  + - harbouring a disease vector
    - breeding of a disease vector
    - food sources for a disease vector
    - transmission of an infectious disease to humans by a disease vector
* the elimination or eradication of disease vectors on a specified premises.

**The evidence and information that leads to the Chief Health Officer issuing a disease vector control notice will be part of a consultative discussion with relevant parties.**

#### Examples of when a disease vector control notice may be considered

***Example 1***

Leptospirosis is an infectious disease that is transmitted from animals to humans. Common sources of infection are contact with the urine of infected animals and/or contaminated soil or water.

Increases in Leptospirosis in a particular area of Victoria are often linked to rodent infestations. If a local community is affected, the Chief Health Officer could issue a disease vector control notice, which could require the introduction of specified rodent control measures.

Local government, affected community members and the department would work together to achieve disease reduction.

***Example 2***

Psittacosis (also known as parrot fever) is an infectious disease affecting the lungs. Humans most commonly catch this disease from infected birds by inhaling the bacteria from shed feathers, secretions and droppings.

Increases in Psittacosis notifications are often linked to wild birds that are stressed and shed the bacteria in their droppings and nasal secretions during times of drought or extreme heat.

As bird feeding as a tourist attraction can increase the risk of transmission to humans, the Chief Health Officer could issue a disease vector control notice if the risk to the public from wild bird feeding is considered significant.

Control measures may include introducing signage warning of the risks (in particular to immunocompromised persons), limiting contact and feeding, and appropriate cleaning.

## How can I find out more?

For more information about the changes to vector-borne infectious disease regulations, please visit:

* + [Mosquito management in Victoria - Better Health Channel](https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/mosquito-management-victoria)

To view the exact wording in the regulations, please visit <https://www.legislation.vic.gov.au/> and search ‘Public Health and Wellbeing Regulations’.

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