A report from the Communicable Diseases Network Australia, April to June 2004

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

Biannual meeting

CDNA convened for its biannual meeting in Melbourne on 13 and 14 April 2004. Issues discussed at this meeting included: proposed changes to the CDNA *Guidelines for the Early Clinical and Public Health Management of Meningococcal Disease in Australia*; development of national pertussis guidelines; recommendations flowing from the evaluation of the National Notifiable Diseases Surveillance System; and the national frozen imported oyster meat investigation. The meeting also provided an opportunity for CDNA to participate in a consultation regarding Australia's national capacity to investigate foodborne disease outbreaks, and to establish a relationship with the Health Care Associated Infections Advisory Committee of the Australian Council for Safety and Quality in Health Care.

Gastroenteritis associated with imported quick frozen oyster meat imported from Japan

During this quarter, the sixth outbreak of norovirus illness associated with consumption of contaminated imported frozen oysters in the last 18 months occurred. The six outbreaks have occurred in three different Australian states and territories and were traced back to a single growing region in Japan. The oysters in these outbreaks were consumed both raw and cooked and over 70 people reported illness. OzFoodNet and Food Standards Australia New Zealand, both members of CDNA undertook or were involved in the outbreak investigations and related food recalls and are now working with the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service towards measures to prevent outbreaks relating to these products. To improve Australia's response to outbreaks of national significance, CDNA plans to meet with the Implementation Sub-Committee of the Food Regulation Standing Committee later this year to agree on a proposed approach and revisions to food recall protocols for foodborne diseases.

Severe acute respiratory syndrome and highly pathogenic avian influenza

To assist hospital staff during epidemics of severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) and highly pathogenic avian influenza, CDNA developed *SARS and influenza A (H5N1) – Interim Guidance for Recognition, Investigation and Infection Control, May 2004*. The algorithm briefly explains the steps hospital staff would follow in screening, assessing and reassessing patients. It also recommends appropriate infection control and reporting measures. The algorithm is available from http://www.health.gov.au/avian_influenza/

Improving reporting and control of trachoma

In recognition of the ongoing high prevalence of trachoma in some regions of Australia, and the lack of consistent surveillance data and control activities, CDNA recently established the Trachoma Steering Group. The Group will provide recommendations for surveillance and reporting of trachoma and a mechanism to develop a nationally consistent approach to the public health management of this condition in Australia. It is anticipated that consultation with draft national trachoma guidelines will occur over the next few months, with endorsed guidelines published by the end of 2004. Should you wish to provide input to this project, please contact the CDNA Secretariat. (Contact details see following page).

Australian bat lyssavirus and companion animals

During this reporting period, two incidents were brought to the attention of CDNA in which humans were potentially at risk of infection with Australian bat lyssavirus (ABL). Both involved dogs who had become aggressive following exposure to bats. In the first incident, the bat tested positive for ABL,

and two people bitten by the dog were offered post-exposure prophylaxis. The dog was quarantined and placed under observation for 90 days. In the second incident, the dog killed the bat, the dog was euthanased, and neither animal was tested for ABL. In light of these incidences, CDNA wishes to highlight the precautions necessary to prevent ABL transmission to people. In 2001, CDNA in consultation with the Australian Veterinary Association, and the Australian Government Departments of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, and Health and Ageing, endorsed three documents that provide information relevant to the needs of medical practitioners, veterinarians, and the general public. These documents are all available on the internet at http://www.cda.gov.au/pubs/other/bat_lyssa.htm

Subcommittees and working groups of CDNA

At 30 June 2004, CDNA subcommittees and working groups included:

- Avian Influenza Protocols Working Group
- Intergovernmental Committee on AIDS/HIV, Hepatitis C and Related Diseases
- Invasive Pneumococcal Disease Steering Committee/Pneumococcal Working Party
- Jurisdictional Executive Group
- Meningococcal Disease Committee
- National Arbovirus and Malaria Advisory Committee
- National Enteric Pathogens Surveillance System Steering Committee
- National Immunisation Committee
- National Surveillance Committee
- National Tuberculosis Advisory Committee
- Public Health Laboratory Network
- Trachoma Steering Group

How to contact CDNA

Key activities of CDNA will be reported quarterly in *Communicable Diseases Intelligence*. For further information, please contact the CDNA Secretariat at: email: CDNA@health.gov.au, or telephone +61 2 6289 7983 or refer to the CDNA webpages at http://www.cda.gov.au/cdna/index.htm and http://www.nphp.gov.au/workprog/cdna/index.htm