A report from the Communicable Diseases Network Australia

1 January to 31 March 2006

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.

During the first quarter of 2006, CDNA considered the following issues:

Pre-departure communicable diseases health screening protocol for refugees

In February, CDNA endorsed the *Pre-Departure Communicable Diseases Health Screening Protocol for Refugees Arriving from Africa* for use by the International Office of Migration which conducts pre-departure health screening on behalf of the Australian Government Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs. In March, this was followed by endorsement of *Pre-Departure Communicable Diseases Health Screening Protocol for Refugees Arriving from the Thai/Burmese Border*.

Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service work instruction – processing ill passengers and those requiring yellow fever certification

State and territory health authorities reported an increase in calls from the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service (AQIS) regarding passengers arriving from overseas with diarrhoea. CDNA provided advice to the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing officers liaising with the Australian Customs Service and AQIS.

HIV/AIDS, STI and hepatitis C health promotion programs

In March, CDNA endorsed *Infrastructure Benchmarks for the Design, Implementation and Evaluation of HIV/AIDS, STI and Hepatitis C Health Promotion Programs.* The benchmarks document was developed by the Inter-Governmental Committee on AIDS, Hepatitis C and Related Diseases.

Review of non-Medicare funded pathology services

CDNA approved Dr Rod Givney as their representative in a review of non-Medicare funded pathology services. The review is being undertaken by the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing. This appointment was made in March and is current for the term of the review.

New Chair – National Tuberculosis Advisory Committee

Following his retirement as Chair of the National Tuberculosis Advisory Committee (NTAC), CDNA members thanked Dr Antic for his significant contributions over many years to the management, prevention and control of tuberculosis. CDNA endorsed Dr Vicki Krause as the new Chair of NTAC on 29 March 2006.

New Chair – Case Definitions Working Group

CDNA noted Dr Gary Dowse had resigned as Chair of the Case Definitions Working Group and thanked Gary for his contribution to the development of case definitions used within the National Notifiable Diseases Surveillance System. Working Group member Dr Mark Bartlett was endorsed as the new Chair of the Case Definitions Working Group on 29 March 2006.

Surveillance systems

CDNA continues to provide policy and implementation advice to the Biosecurity Surveillance System project team and the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing. Issues surrounding surveillance, privacy, outbreak case reporting and user testing are focus points for CDNA members, in particular the CDNA jurisdictional members. CDNA is also providing policy and implementation advice regarding the Syndromic Surveillance System being developed by the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing.

Pandemic influenza

Jurisdictional representatives from CDNA continue to be involved in planning for possible pandemic influenza through their membership of the National Influenza Pandemic Action Committee Jurisdictional Executive Group. Teleconference meetings have allowed the group to consider issues which will be directly relevant at the jurisdictional level if a pandemic were to occur. Issues such as communication strategies, antiviral availability and registers, social distancing and border screening are under consideration.

Office of Health Protection

In February 2006 the Australian Government established a new division within the Department of Health and Ageing – the Office of Health Protection (OHP). OHP will consolidate and build on the work already undertaken by the Government to manage communicable diseases and maintain Australia's biosecurity. In particular, the OHP will lead national health preparedness for a possible pandemic or other health emergency. CDNA secretariat services are resourced through OHP.

Note: Documents published by CDNA can be viewed at www.health.gov.au/cdna.