



Food for Thought

A publication prepared by the Food Unit, Department of Health WA

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Introduction

Welcome to the 11th issue of the Food Unit's Food for Thought newsletter. In this month's publication you will find a guide to food safety during the festive season, an introduction to OzFoodNet and the role they play in foodborne outbreak investigation, and an update on the *Food Act 2008* report and planning workshops.

Safe holiday feasting

People are reminded to pay close attention to food safety during the summer festive season and avoid food poisoning. It is important for people to practice safe food handling and good hygiene habits, particularly during summer as temperatures increase and people gather to share food and drinks.



Important food safety tips include:

- **Wash your hands** before preparing food and after handling raw meats, going to the toilet or doing any other activity that may cause contamination.
- **Prepare and store raw meat separately from cooked ready to eat foods.** Raw meat should be stored on a shelf separately from ready to eat foods in the fridge or in a sealed container whenever possible. Items such as knives and chopping boards used on raw meats should be washed before being used to handle ready to eat foods.
- **Refrigerate leftovers** immediately after a meal and keep for a maximum of three days. If reheating make sure the food is reheated until steaming hot.
- **Have plenty of fridge and freezer space** as overloading will reduce cooling efficiency. Low risk items such as alcohol and water can be kept in eskies to free up refrigerator space.

- **Cool food when outdoors.** When refrigeration is not available the easiest way to keep risky foods cool when transporting or storing them is to use portable car fridges, insulated cool/hot boxes or eskies with plenty of ice.
- **Defrost frozen food in the fridge or microwave.** Defrosting food on the bench top can be unsafe and increase bacteria growth in foods as they defrost.
- **Be extra careful with seafood.** Ask for your purchase to be packed with ice, transport it home in a cooler and place in the fridge immediately.
- **Cook raw meats thoroughly.** Raw meats such as chicken and minced meat products should be cooked thoroughly, make sure the juices run clear, not pink after cooking.
- **Portion food before cooling.** For example slice meats, cut large poultry into smaller portions and place liquid foods such as casseroles in shallow containers (no more than 5cm deep).
- **Cloth the Christmas Ham.** A Christmas ham will keep for several weeks with proper handling by removing it from its plastic wrap, covering it with a clean cloth soaked in water and vinegar so it does not dry out, and store it in the fridge at or below 5 °C.

For more information or advice on food safety issues, the community are advised to contact their local council environmental health services.

What is OzFoodNet?

OzFoodNet WA is a group of three epidemiologists who work in the Communicable Disease Control Directorate in the Department of Health (DOH). One of the roles of OzFoodNet WA is to team up with the DOH Food Unit and Local Government to help investigate outbreaks that are suspected to be foodborne. OzFoodNet can help to find the cause of these outbreaks by conducting epidemiological studies. These studies involve interviews with both well and ill people, and include questions about illness details and what foods people ate. Food consumption is then analysed to determine if there is a statistical association between eating certain foods and becoming ill. Information on foods associated with illness is passed to Local Government (via the Food Unit) for consideration during the environmental investigation. Additional information, such as time of illness onset, symptoms, and duration of illness, is also collected, and this can give information on

the severity of illness, and clues about the pathogen causing illness. Confirmation of the pathogen involved is obtained by collecting and testing faecal specimens, and OzFoodNet can help to facilitate this process. Identifying the source of illness is essential for stopping on-going outbreaks. In recent years OzFoodNet worked with the Food Unit and Local Government to find that on-going outbreaks of Salmonellosis were caused by contaminated alfalfa sprouts and paw paw, and action was taken to stop these outbreaks.



In addition OzFoodNet is part of a network of epidemiologists employed in each State and Territory to enhance national foodborne illness surveillance. OzFoodNet liaises with other jurisdictional OzFoodNet epidemiologists when there are multi-jurisdictional foodborne outbreaks, national studies on foodborne pathogens and for the national collation of foodborne outbreak information. Identifying the food/s that cause illness and collating that information is very helpful for building up state and national information about high-risk foods or production practices. In the past few years a series of outbreaks around Australia were caused by a particular genetic type of *Salmonella* Typhimurium. Outbreak investigations in different states identified eggs as the cause of these outbreaks, so this information was summarised and passed to food regulators. Nationally,

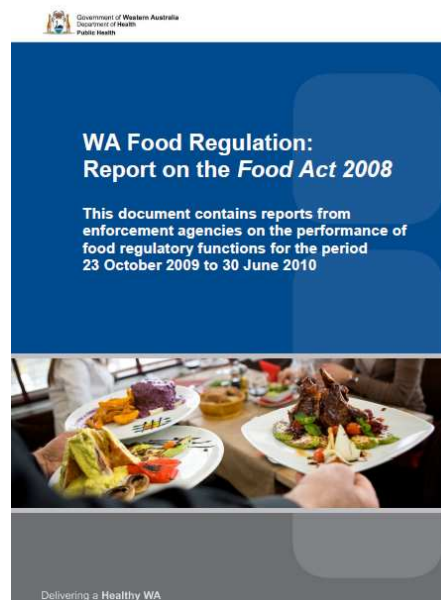
OzFoodNet has also conducted multijurisdictional epidemiological investigations that identified an association between eating wraps containing chicken and *Listeria* infections, and eating semi-dried tomatoes and hepatitis A infections.

Other local activities of OzFoodNet include regular surveillance of disease notifications to detect clusters, and following-up individual cases of important foodborne diseases such as shiga-toxin-producing *E. coli* (STEC) and *Listeria*. OzFoodNet also prepares reports each fortnight, quarter and year on foodborne disease in Western Australia and these can be found on the [Public Health website](#). Further information can be obtained by emailing OzFoodNet on OzfoodnetWA@health.wa.gov.au

Food Act 2008 Updates

The inaugural *Food Act 2008* (Food Act) Report has now been released by Kim Snowball, Director General of the Department of Health. Mr Snowball congratulated all parties for working diligently to provide assurances on the safety of food available in the local marketplace.

The Food Act Report contains information on food regulation activities from all 140 enforcement agencies in Western Australia for the reporting period 24 October 2009 to 30 June 2010. Following analysis of the information provided, a number of key determinations were made relating to the implementation of the Food Act. The Report can be accessed on the reporting requirements webpage on the [Public Health website](#).



In response to the key determinations, the Food Unit has commenced facilitating Food Act Planning Workshops. The purpose of these workshops is to engage local government on key components of the Food Act including authorised officers, administration, assessing of food businesses and auditing. More workshops are planned in metropolitan and regional areas and the outcomes of all workshops will contribute the Food Unit's Strategic Plan.



**Mark Fallows and Marilyn Macfarlane
delivering the Food Act Planning
Workshop in Perth**

Compilation of the Food Act Report for the period 1 July 2010 to 30 June 2011 has been commenced by the Food Unit. It is hoped that the response rate from enforcement agencies for this Report will also be 100%, in accordance with Section 121 of the Food Act.

For further information on the Food Act reporting requirements or to register interest in a workshop, please contact the Food Unit on 9388 4903 or email

foodsafety@health.wa.gov.au

Bath Milk



In Western Australia all milk for human consumption must be pasteurised, as specified by clause 15 of Standard 4.2.4 of the *Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code* (the Code); the only exception being goat's milk for which Standard 4.2.4 does not apply. Pasteurisation reduces any pathogenic micro-organisms that may be present in the milk to safe levels, and thus reduces the risk of food-borne disease from the consumption of milk. Enforcement agencies should be aware that unpasteurised milk may be available for sale as pet milk or bath milk. It is important that this style of milk is correctly labelled and sold as not being fit for human consumption as there have been incidents reported in other jurisdictions of such milk being sold for human consumption.

Managing Chemical Safety

In a recent incident in a UK restaurant two young children sustained injuries to mouth and throat after their cups were filled from an unmarked jug containing pipe cleaning fluid instead of water. Cleaning chemicals if ingested or contaminate food and food contact surfaces are potentially dangerous. This incident has highlighted the importance of managing chemical risk. Food businesses need to store and use cleaning chemicals correctly.

Food businesses in Australia are required to comply with clause 15, Storage Facilities, of Standard 3.2.2 of the *Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code* (the Code). The clause required food businesses to have adequate storage facilities for items that are likely to be a source of food contamination, including chemicals. Storage must be located where there is no likelihood of stored items contaminating food or food contact surfaces.

Food Unit Staff

Rod Dixon has retired!

On 14 July 2011, the Food Unit farewelled Rod Dixon as he retired from the Department of Health (DOH). Rod was employed by the DOH on two occasions, the first being 1971 – 1977 when he worked as a meat inspector at Robb's Jetty and Watson's abattoirs.

After a period of time working for the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service in the meat inspection area, Rod returned to the DOH in February 1992 to work in the Meat Safety Branch and subsequently the Food Unit.



During this time, Rod was instrumental in implementing significant changes within the meat industry following the Garibaldi food poisoning outbreak. Rod was tireless in his efforts to improve standards within the meat industry and was willing and able to take on all challenges in this regard.

Food Unit staff wish Rod and wife Marilyn a long and happy retirement after 25 years working for the DOH.

Vale John Michael Itzstein

Sadly, John Itzstein from the Food Unit passed away on 1 August 2011 at the age of 69 after a short illness. At the time of his death John had been working for the Department of Health (DOH) in excess of 34 years having commenced work with the DOH in April 1977.

John, who was an electrical traveller for GE prior to joining the DOH, worked as a meat inspector at Midland Junction abattoir and subsequently at Robb's Jetty and Watson's abattoir.

In 1980 John transferred to Public Buildings where he worked on many major developments that are



still of significance today.

John transferred to the Meat Safety Branch in approximately 1991 and then into the Food Unit. John had many skills and talents, his knife skills were legendary earning him the nick name of 'Zorro'.

John will be remembered as a person committed to his work, his work colleagues in particular, and a very strong family man. John is survived by his daughter Sonia, son Richard and four grandchildren.

For food enquiries please contact the Food Unit on:
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Thoughts, comments and topic suggestions are also welcomed.