



To:	General Practitioners, Pediatricians, ID and General Physicians, Practice Nurses, Pharmacists, After-hours Centers and Emergency Departments in the Wellington and Lower Hutt regions.
From:	Dr Craig Thornley, Medical Officer of Health
Date:	1 December 2015
Title:	Public Health Alert: Warning of Hepatitis A risk associated with imported frozen berries

Please distribute the following information to relevant staff in your organisation.

If you would like to receive this by email please advise RPH of your email on rph@huttvalleydhb.org.nz.

All public health alerts are available at www.rph.org.nz (health professionals – public health alerts)

Warning of potential Hepatitis A risk associated with imported frozen berries

Statement

The Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) has issued a statement warning of potential risk of Hepatitis A associated with imported frozen berries.

Background to the warning

Four cases of Hepatitis A are thought to be linked to packaged imported frozen berries. MPI does not consider that there is sufficient information to recall specific products, however evidence from the cases and from international experience indicates a risk of exposure to Hepatitis A from consuming imported frozen berries.

Products identified in the warning

All brands, batches and sizes of the following types of berries, in frozen form, may pose a risk of Hepatitis A:

- Strawberries
- Raspberries
- Blackberries
- Blueberries
- Boysenberries

Fresh berries have not been implicated in the investigations, and are not mentioned in the warning.

The information contained in this message is legally privileged and confidential. If the reader of this message is not the intended recipient, you are hereby notified that use, dissemination, distribution or reproduction of this message is prohibited. If you have received this message in error, please notify us immediately. Thank you.

He ture no nga korero katoa kei roto o tenei karere, no reira, kia tupato. Mehemea kaore matau kua e mau. Me whakamohiotia atu ki to Tari, me te mea nana I tonu mai. E Tika Hoki.



Evidence from investigations does not suggest any link with frozen berries used as ingredients in commercially prepared and packaged products sold with a shelf-life claim. Ingredients for such products are typically subject to a heat treatment step during the manufacturing process.

Frozen berries used by cafes and restaurants as an ingredient to prepare smoothies and other ready-to-eat products are considered to have the same level of risk as products sold for home consumption.

Advice

- Elderly persons and those with chronic liver damage should avoid frozen berries that have not been heat treated.
- To avoid potential risks, frozen berries should be briefly boiled before consumption, or cooked at temperatures exceeding 85 degrees Celsius for 1 minute.
- Washing frozen berries will not inactivate the virus.
- Those who are concerned about the safety of specific products should contact the **MPI Consumer Helpline: 0800 008 333**
- Those who are concerned about potential risk to their health are recommended to seek advice from a medical practitioner or to call **Healthline** on **0800 611 116**

Background information on Hepatitis A

Signs and symptoms of Hepatitis A can include fever, malaise, anorexia, nausea or abdominal discomfort, jaundice, and an enlarged tender liver. Children are often asymptomatic and occasionally present with atypical symptoms, including diarrhoea, cough, coryza or arthralgia. Jaundice is very unusual in children younger than 4 years, and occurs in only 10 percent of cases in the 4–6 year age group.

The incubation period for Hepatitis A ranges from 15-50 days. People are most infectious during the 1-2 weeks before and the first few days after the onset of jaundice

Transmission is by the faecal-oral route, usually person-to-person.

Suspected cases of Hepatitis A should be notified to the local Medical Officer of Health, notification should not await laboratory confirmation.

Laboratory confirmation should be attempted. Laboratory confirmation requires positive Hepatitis A-specific IgM in serum (in the absence of recent vaccination).

If you suspect a case of Hepatitis A please:

- **Notify** suspected cases of hepatitis A during office hours to the RPH notifications line on 04 570 9267, or if after hours, to the on-call medical officer of health on 04 570 9007;



- **Request** hepatitis A IgM serology and LFTs, mark the request “Urgent” and copy to “Medical Officer of Health” at Regional Public Health;
- **Advise** the suspected case to not attend work, social events or gatherings if they are an adult. If a child, advise their parent/guardian their child cannot attend school/kindergarten/playgroup. The ill person should remain away until their illness is diagnosed;
- **Advise** the ill person about the need for effective hand washing, especially after going to the toilet or before/after preparing food;
- **Advise** that the ill person should have their own towel, facecloth, and toothbrush and they should not share these items; and
- **Advise** those who are ill that they should NOT prepare food for others while they are ill, especially if the food is eaten raw.

MPI has instituted a surveillance programme, including additional testing, focused on imported frozen berries.

Details of the Ministry for Primary Industries warning statement are available at:

<https://www.mpi.govt.nz/news-and-resources/media-releases/increased-surveillance-of-imported-frozen-berry-products/>

For further information on case management and investigation please refer to the Communicable Disease Control Manual: <http://www.health.govt.nz/system/files/documents/publications/cd-manual-hepatitis-a-may2012.pdf>. Note that vaccination is usually only recommended for close contacts of confirmed cases

General information on Hepatitis A is available at: <https://www.health.govt.nz/your-health/conditions-and-treatments/diseases-and-illnesses/hepatitis>

For information on hepatitis A vaccine, please call the Immunisation Advisory Centre free phone number 0800 IMMUNE (0800 466 863) or visit their website: www.immune.org.nz