

PUBLIC HEALTH ALERT

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Regional Public Health
Better Health For The Greater Wellington Region



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:	4 December 2015
Title:	Public Health Alert: Warning of Hepatitis A risk associated with imported frozen berries

Please distribute the following information from the Ministry of Health and Ministry for Primary Industries 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)

National Health Advisory

Hepatitis A cases - the Ministry for Primary Industries recall Fruzio mixed strawberry and blackberry frozen berries

Summary

Investigations are continuing into the four cases of hepatitis A thought to be linked to imported frozen berries. These investigations have now indicated that the sequence of the virus strains in the four cases in New Zealand are identical. In addition, the New Zealand strain sequence is identical to the sequence identified in cases in the outbreak that occurred in Australia in the first half of 2015.

Based on this information and results of other on-going investigations, the Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) is initiating a directed recall of Fruzio brand mixed strawberry and blackberry frozen berries (1kg and 500g bags).

The MPI media statement is attached.

Information on hepatitis A for health professionals

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.

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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.

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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).

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>

Further information on hepatitis A can be found at: <https://www.health.govt.nz/your-health/conditions-and-treatments/diseases-and-illnesses/hepatitis>

Media Release

Thursday 3 Dec

MPI recalls frozen berries

The Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) has made significant progress in its investigation of imported frozen berries associated with the increased risk from Hepatitis A.

“Today we have directed a specific company to recall a brand of imported frozen berries from shelves,” says MPI’s director plants food and environment Peter Thomson.

“The company is FSL Foods, and the brand being recalled is Fruzio Mixed Berries sold in 1kg and 500 gram bags. This product contains blackberries and strawberries.

“If you have this product at home it should be discarded.

“Our investigation is ongoing and, at this stage, our advice concerning all imported frozen berries stays the same. We are not able to rule out further recalls.

“We thank FSL Foods for its full co-operation in this recall.

“This is an evolving and complex situation and we were able to reach this conclusion today because of new genetic evidence about the virus and a continuing examination of the supply chain.

“In the meantime the general advice about food safety applies. People should wash their hands before eating and preparing food. Anyone who is concerned should briefly boil any frozen berries before eating them, or ensure cooking exceeds 85 degrees Celsius for one minute.

“Elderly persons and those with chronic liver damage should avoid imported frozen berries that have not been heat treated.

“If you are concerned about a potential risk to your health, or the health of others, you should seek advice from your medical practitioner, or call the Ministry of Health's Healthline – 0800 61 11 16.

“If you are concerned about the safety of food products, contact the MPI consumer helpline (0800 00 83 33).”

For more information call Sid Pickering 029 894 2465 or email sid.pickering@mpi.govt.nz

ENDS