

Hazards to Health: e-notification to your Medical Officer of Health



Hazardous substances disease and injury notifications

An electronic notification system has been designed for general practices to report cases of disease and injury related to exposure to hazardous substances, including lead absorption. It was developed by *bestpractice* Decision Support (BPAC Inc) and the Centre for Public Health Research, Massey University and is funded by the Ministry of Health.

The notification system was introduced progressively throughout New Zealand in 2013. There were 244 notifications in 2013 and 229 in 2014. Of these, 180 and 130 were for lead absorption in 2013 and 2014 respectively.

What is defined as a hazardous substance injury or disease?

A hazardous substance is anything that can explode, catch fire, oxidise, corrode or be toxic to humans, as defined in the Hazardous Substances and New Organisms Act 1996. The Act requires medical practitioners to notify cases of injury or disease caused by exposure to a hazardous substance to the Medical Officer of Health.

There are a multitude of possibilities of exposure to hazardous substances, such as: ingestion of cleaning products or cosmetics by children, overdose with agrichemicals, illness caused by exposure to solvents or chlorine, contact dermatitis due to chemicals, a fireworks burn or eye injury and “huffing” (inhaling) of butane.

How should a case be notified?

Look for the “Hazardous Substances and Lead notifications” module on the *bestpractice* Decision Support dashboard (see Figure 1 for an example). Submitting the form will send it to your local Medical Officer of Health via a secure system.

If your practice does not currently have access to this electronic form, contact your local Public Health Unit to notify them of a case.

Lead notifications

Cases of lead exposure including occupational and non-occupational, in which a patient has a blood lead level of ≥ 0.48 $\mu\text{mol/L}$, are required to be notified. The electronic form can be used for these notifications.

Poisoning from chemical contamination of the environment

Cases of poisoning arising from chemical contamination of the environment (e.g. from carbon monoxide, agrichemical spraydrift) are also required to be notified under the Health Act 1956, and this can be done via the electronic form.

Why notify?

The Medical Officer of Health and Public Health Unit staff will assess the information about the exposure and determine if further follow-up with the patient is required.

Primary care notifications allow identification of substances which are causing harm, and can lead to controls being put in place to prevent disease or injury. For example, exposure to lead from deteriorating lead-based paint can be reduced through a range of remedial actions. Some controls may be regulatory; for example, the sale of highly alkaline dishwashing powders was prohibited in 2007 following increased reports of oesophageal and upper airway injuries in children who ingested this powder.

For further information about reporting exposures to hazardous substances, contact your local Public Health Unit, or for more information about the e-notification tool, contact:

Fei Xu
f.xu@massey.ac.nz
0800 588 265

Helene Marsters
t.h.marsters@massey.ac.nz
04 979 3382

cp hr | hsss Hazardous Substances Surveillance System

bestpractice
DECISION SUPPORT FOR HEALTH PROFESSIONALS

Figure 1: Example of the Exposure Event tab of the notification form – ingestion of dishwashing powder.

1 The notification form has four tabs:

The notification form has four tabs: Enter details in **Exposure event** and **Assessment**. **Notifier/patient details** are pre-populated from the PMs. Useful information is available in **Resources**

2 Tick boxes summarising the patient history

3 Enter the name of the substance (at least one field is required)

Hazardous Substances Disease & Injury Reporting Tool

Send notification to Medical Officer of Health at: **Regional Public Health**

Exposure Event

Exposure route: Ingestion Inhalation Skin contact Eye contact

Date exposure began: **1/12/2012** OR Month/Year OR Unknown

Exposure length: < 1 day between 1 day & 1 month ≥ 1 month Unknown

Place of exposure: Home Workplace School/preschool Public place Unknown Other

Intent: Unintentional Intentional Unknown

Is this case known to be linked to other cases of the same exposure event: Yes No

Substance

Substance category(s): Household chemical Agrichemical Industrial chemical Fireworks/explosive Lead Unknown Other

Household: eg. cosmetic, dishwashing powder, fumigants / Industrial: eg. solvent, chlorine
Agrichemical: eg. pesticide, animal remedies, spraydrift / Other: eg. asbestos, mercury, arsenic

Substance name (complete at least 1 field)

Chemical name	Product name	Common name	Unknown
e.g. sodium hypochlorite	Janola	bleach	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="text"/>	Complete dishwashing powder	<input type="text"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Buttons: Refresh, Park, Cancel, Submit