

Medical Bulletin

Welcome to the first South East Public Health Unit (SEPHU) Medical Bulletin

This bulletin has been created to provide updates and insights to the medical community across about the public health matters across the SEPHU catchment with a focus on communicable diseases and key population health priorities.

At the end of this bulletin, we have answered some frequently asked questions . If you have any questions for the team or want to get in touch, please email us . We welcome suggestions for other topics you would like covered or additional information you would like.

All the work of SEPHU is supported by a dedicated team of doctors based at Monash Health. Our team includes:

- Director, Professor Rhonda Stuart
- Three Public Health Physicians: A/Prof Simon Crouch, Dr Evelyn Wong and Dr Edura Jalil,
- Four part-time Infectious Diseases Physicians: Dr Anna Pierce, Dr Lucy Attwood, Dr Victor Au Yeung and Dr Khai Lin Kong
- Public Health Medicine Registrar: Dr Aswan Tai

The SEPHU Catchment

The SEPHU catchment is made up of the following Local Government Areas

- Cardinia Shire
- City of Bayside
- City of Casey
- City of Frankston
- City of Glen Eira
- City of Greater Dandenong
- City of Kingston
- City of Monash
- City of Port Phillip
- City of Stonnington
- Mornington Peninsula Shire



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Notifying communicable diseases

An important part of the work we do is to ensure all notifiable communicable diseases are reported correctly and in line with the requirements of the Public Health and Wellbeing Regulations (2019). Currently, SEPHU is directly managing around 25 notifiable conditions.

Urgent notifiable conditions must be reported by phone on suspicion and diagnosis. Please notify these conditions by calling 1300 651 160 – the call prompts will put you through to the correct team (for some conditions you will need the patient’s postcode to make sure you reach the right public health unit). By the end of March, SEPHU will be handling all calls in our catchment about rabies, Australian bat lyssavirus, mpox, invasive meningococcal disease and hepatitis A.

Routine notifiable conditions must be reported in writing within 5 days of diagnosis. You can find online forms for all the routine conditions here: .

This page also contains general information about disease notification.

Over the course of 2023, almost all notifiable conditions will move to management by local public health units.



Supporting Post Exposure Prophylaxis

SEPHU is able to support medical practitioners when Post Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP) is required for contacts of cases with a notifiable condition.

Examples include providing advice on when to give and where to source rabies vaccine/rabies immunoglobulin (RIG) (for overseas exposures and local bat exposures), or hepatitis A vaccine/normal human immunoglobulin for exposure to a hepatitis A case.

We can also provide advice on when clearance antibiotics may be appropriate for contacts of cases with invasive meningococcal disease.

We will provide this advice when receiving a notification for all relevant urgent notifications, but we can also be contacted for general advice as well (for example, if someone has been exposed to a bat and you don’t suspect that they have lyssavirus but would like advice on providing rabies vaccine or RIG).

All urgent notifications should be made by calling 1300 651 160. For all other advice, you can email sephu.trace@monashhealth.org. This email is monitored 7 days a week between the hours of 8am and 4:30pm.

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Meningococcal Disease

There are three steps in the public health management of invasive meningococcal disease (IMD).

1. Notification

Please contact LPHUs by calling 1300 651 160 to notify if you suspect/are testing a patient for IMD.

2. Case management

The treating doctor is responsible for the clinical management of the case. Local Public Health Units (LPHUs) will interview the case or next of kin to determine whether further public health actions are required, such as attendance at any high-risk settings during the case's at-risk period. Please also inform the LPHU if there has been clinical deterioration or if the case has died.

3. Contact management

a. Prescribing clearance antibiotics

If there is high suspicion or a confirmed case of IMD, the treating doctor can facilitate the provision of clearance antibiotics to **household** contacts. Further information can be found on the [Department Of Health's website](#).

For ease of communication with contacts, LPHUs request that treating teams (of highly suspicious or confirmed cases) inform **household** contacts who have been prescribed clearance antibiotics that LPHUs will contact them for further advice on vaccination and to address any concerns.

b. Vaccination

For confirmed IMD cases with serotype A, C, W or Y, unimmunised household contacts are recommended to get vaccinated. Vaccination reduces the ongoing risk of invasive disease among contacts due to the prolonged risk of secondary cases in household settings. No cost will be incurred for eligible household contacts. LPHUs will facilitate access to vaccination for this cohort.

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A focus on hepatitis

Local public health units have been responsible for the follow-up of notifications of hepatitis B and C since September 2022. Prior to this, routine public health management for viral hepatitis included collecting and maintaining data for surveillance, as well as identifying and investigating uncommon sources of infection (mainly for newly acquired infections).

SEPHU has implemented a supplemental response to viral hepatitis notifications to optimise the care of all individuals with chronic hepatitis B (CHBV) or chronic hepatitis C who reside in the SEPHU catchment. Specifically, we aim to ensure initial access and ongoing linkage to appropriate health care.

We are also focused on ensuring all pregnant women with CHBV are linked to specific antenatal care and that all babies born to mothers with CHBV receive hepatitis B immunoglobulin and their birth dose of hepatitis B vaccine.

SEPHU is working closely with Monash Health Gastroenterology's 'Hep C and me' program to facilitate referrals for treatment of hepatitis C. Medical practitioners who are not comfortable providing hepatitis C treatment can refer directly to this program, or SEPHU can do this on their behalf.

Population health

Following the establishment of Local Public Health Units (LPHUs) in late 2020 to strengthen the response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the remit of LPHUs has since been expanded to the management of other notifiable communicable diseases, health promotion and prevention of non-communicable disease activities.

With this extension of the function of LPHUs to include health promotion and disease prevention, **SEPHU has been developing a population health plan for our catchment.** LPHUs are well positioned to undertake place-based health promotion, primary prevention and early intervention, tailoring priorities and activities to the needs of their populations.

To inform SEPHU's catchment plan, a comprehensive population-needs assessment was conducted along with mapping of health promotion activities in our catchment. Stakeholder consultations, including Health Services Partnerships, local councils, Primary Health Networks and VicHealth are currently underway to inform our health priorities to be addressed in our catchment plan.

The next phase of stakeholder consultations will include peak bodies, community health services and government departments such as Education. These rounds of consultations are planned for March-April with the aim of finalising our catchment plan by the end of June this year.

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Frequently asked questions

What diseases is SEPHU currently managing?

By the end of March 2023 SEPHU will be managing 30 notifiable conditions. These include:

- **Urgent notifiable conditions:** mpox; rabies; Australian bat lyssavirus; invasive meningococcal disease; hepatitis A
- **Routine notifiable conditions:** COVID-19; influenza; respiratory syncytial virus; pertussis; Buruli ulcer; varicella; invasive pneumococcal disease; hepatitis B and D; hepatitis C; shigellosis; Ross River and Barmah Forrest viruses; chlamydia; gonorrhoea; syphilis; Q fever; shiga toxin producing *E. coli*;

What diseases will SEPHU be managing by the end of the year?

By the end of 2023, it is anticipated that SEPHU will be managing all notifiable communicable diseases with the exception of tuberculosis, which is managed by the Victoria Tuberculosis Program based at the Royal Melbourne Hospital.

What is the current public health guidance for invasive group A streptococcal disease prophylaxis?

Currently, there is no national or Victorian guidance for the public health management of invasive group A streptococcal (iGAS) disease. Some jurisdictions in Australia recommend prophylaxis for mother-neonate pairs only. Please contact SEPHU if you would like to discuss prophylaxis options further.

How is SEPHU different to the Department of Health?

SEPHU, like other local public health units, has been established to provide place-based management of priority public health concerns in South East Metropolitan Melbourne. Through strong connections with the local community, SEPHU is able to engage closely with priority populations and ensure that the public health response is targeted to those most in need.

The follow-up of communicable diseases by the SEPHU team will be similar to that previously conducted by the Department of Health; however, there is capacity to provide enhanced follow-up across many more conditions. A good example is our work to improve access to care for people diagnosed with viral hepatitis.

Can I call SEPHU directly for advice or to notify a communicable disease?

Urgent notifiable conditions should be called through to the central telephone number – 1300 651 160. Where appropriate, these calls will be forwarded directly to SEPHU. Routine notifiable conditions should be notified online at: <https://www.health.vic.gov.au/infectious-diseases/notifiable-infectious-diseases-conditions-and-micro-organisms>.

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We are always happy to provide advice and assist where possible. Please email us at SEPHU.trace@monashhealth.org This inbox is monitored 7 days a week.

Does SEPHU have a webpage with information on communicable diseases similar to the Department of Health?

We are continuing to develop the SEPHU website – <https://sephu.org/>. Currently, it contains information about COVID-19, mpox and Buruli ulcer. We will continue to add information over the coming months.

Information on communicable diseases for health professionals is available from the Department of Health at: <https://www.health.vic.gov.au/infectious-diseases/disease-information-and-advice>.

Information for patients and members of the community is available from the Better Health Channel at: <https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/>