

Date: Tuesday, 6 May 2014

ALERT ... PUBLIC HEALTH UNIT WARNS PARENTS TO WATCH OUT FOR BANDICOOTS

An increase in Salmonella Java cases is being reported among toddlers and young children on the Northern Beaches.

Salmonella Java is a bacterial infection that can cause fever, nausea, vomiting, stomach pains and diarrhoea.

Northern Sydney Local Health District's Director Public Health, Dr Michael Staff, has warned that bandicoot droppings may be the source of infection for the recently reported cases.

He is warning parents and carers to be alert for bandicoot activity in their backyards.

Dr Staff said Salmonella Java can be caused by accidentally ingesting material containing the bacterium. In the past few years young children on the Northern Beaches have been diagnosed with the condition after ingesting sand from public parks and child care centres.

He said testing and removal of the effected sand from play areas had controlled, but not eliminated, cases of the illness in recent years.

Dr Staff said cases of Salmonella Java began appearing again in February, following several months when no cases had been reported.

"So far this year we've had 19 cases confirmed and while some have been traced to play area sand, it appears that many children may have been infected by contact with bandicoot droppings," he said.

The vast majority of parents with sick children this year had reported increased bandicoot activity in their backyards: "They've reported conical holes in their lawns, which is a sure sign of bandicoot activity," Dr Staff said.

The Northern Sydney Public Health Unit had inspected the backyards of several cases and bandicoot droppings collected at one property had tested positive for the Salmonella Java, Dr Staff added.

He believes children may be coming into indirect contact with bandicoot droppings while playing in their backyards.

"Young children tend to put their fingers in their mouths a lot and this could transfer the bacterium to them if they have touched a contaminated surface."

To help prevent further spread of the illness the Public Health Unit recommends that parents of young children consider taking steps to prevent bandicoots entering their backyards, regularly clear animal droppings from areas where their children play, discourage children from putting their hands or toys in their mouth when playing outside, and make sure their children wash their hands after playing outside.

Garden fencing made of a mesh such as chicken wire that is at least 500 mm high and goes into the ground to a depth of at least 150 mm is an effective barrier to prevent bandicoots entering backyards.

Further information about bandicoots can be found at;

<http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/animals/Bandicoots.htm>

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