

Food poisoning time bomb

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Two colourful designs, painted on recycled blinds, relating to food poisoning were developed, as part of an Aboriginal environmental health needs assessment undertaken in the North Area Health Service of NSW.

The “Bacterial Time Bomb” wall hanging depicts how quickly bacteria can grow on certain foods left at normal room temperature. When the amount of bacteria on food grows to such a level that it causes food poisoning, it is said to have reached “the infective dose”. This is likened to a bacterial time bomb going off.

The “Food Safety” wall hanging depicts safe ways of buying food, getting it home, handling food hygienically, food preparation and cross contamination, as well as food storage.

Both wall hangings were redesigned to incorporate non-Indigenous as well as multi-cultural population groups.

Feedback on all four hangings was overwhelmingly positive in relation to recall of the health messages.

Objectives

- To increase the level of awareness of food safety issues amongst Indigenous and non-Indigenous population groups in the Northern River Area Health Service of NSW.
- To decrease the incidence of food poisoning in the same population groups.

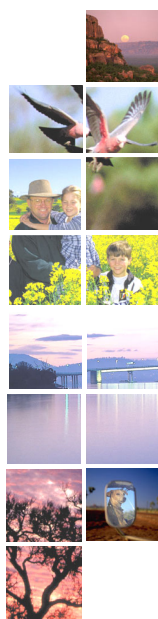
Rationale

Food safety is a national concern, not only a concern of Indigenous populations. The reason that such a resource has been aimed at the Indigenous population, is that it was one of the key environmental health issues defined by the Indigenous population of the Northern Rivers Area Health Service to be addressed as a result of a recent needs assessment. There are also very few food safety resources solely designed for Indigenous people. Most, in fact, are aimed at the mainstream Australian population.

Every year, Australia has a higher estimated rate of food poisoning than Britain, United States or New Zealand.

A report released in mid-1999 by the Australian New Zealand Food Authority, calling for new food safety standards in Australia, estimated that in any year, 220 out of every 1000 Australians will become sick from something they eat.

Every day 11 500 Australians become ill from food poisoning. It costs the Australian health services more than \$2.6 billion per year.



Food poisoning has increased in Australian in recent years largely because Australians are demanding fresher food.

Freshly cut salads, vacuum-packed ready-made meals on supermarket shelves and the regular use of refrigeration to prolong shelf life have all contributed to food poisoning.

Food can now be prepared and kept for longer periods before being sold to consumers, which also means bacteria and viruses, not destroyed in that preparation, have longer to multiply.

Target groups

- Indigenous environmental health workers and educators involved in teaching about health issues involving food safety.
- All people (Indigenous and non-Indigenous) involved in buying, preparing, storing and/or serving food, for private or profitable purposes.