New food safety measures designed to prevent further outbreaks of salmonella gastroenteritis associated with the consumption of raw egg products, have been announced by the Director of Public Health, Dr Roscoe Taylor.

Eggs are a safe and excellent source of nutrition when handled and prepared correctly. However, in recent years, there have been several outbreaks of salmonella gastroenteritis linked to the consumption of raw or undercooked egg products, including the most recent outbreak in the Hobart area.

Dr Taylor said rigorous investigations involving many hundreds of hours of work by the Public and Environmental Health Service, and our colleagues in the Department of Primary Industry, have helped to underpin the further measures that we now feel obliged to put in place.

All the evidence collected so far indicates that there is no single ‘magic bullet’ solution to preventing further outbreaks of salmonella gastroenteritis. Dr Taylor said things can go wrong at each step of the way from farm to fork, and so multiple control points and strategies are required - in just the same way as we recommend that drinking water authorities use a ‘catchment-to-tap’ approach to drinking water management."

The Public and Environmental Health Service has previously issued several warnings to both the food industry and the public outlining the hazards associated with raw egg products and cautioning against their continued use.

Dr Taylor said given the inherent risk that apparently continues to be associated with raw egg products, it was his view that, without urgent and more rigorous controls over the handling of raw egg products, it was not possible to say that further outbreaks of salmonella gastroenteritis would not arise, particularly during warmer months.

OzFoodNet - the Australian national surveillance system for foodborne diseases, has reported that the number of egg-related salmonella outbreaks across Australia increased in 2006 and 2007 when compared to previous years. Eggs were responsible for approximately 14% of the 115 foodborne disease outbreaks occurring in 2006 and 12% of the 138 outbreaks in 2007.

During these two years, health departments in all states and territories, except the NT, investigated outbreaks implicating eggs that affected a total of 688 people. A wide range of foods were identified as a cause of these outbreaks including desserts, salad dressings, sauces, milkshakes and undercooked eggs. The reason for the increase in outbreaks was unclear, but it stimulated national discussions about means to prevent disease from potentially contaminated eggs.

In August 2007, Federal, State and Territory Governments met with industry and stakeholders at a National Egg Food Safety Summit to discuss how to tackle the problem of egg-associated illness. Dr Taylor said that given the national increase and our local experience of salmonella outbreaks associated with eggs, we propose to introduce new measures to control the safety of raw egg products in Tasmania as a matter of urgency. “We recognise that this is going to be an impost on the food industry, but the measures are designed as an interim step to better protect public health and safety and will be reviewed if and when more is known about the way in which salmonella is causing these outbreaks,” Dr Taylor said.

Under the new requirements all food businesses choosing to make raw egg products must document the method of manufacture and follow strict and auditable procedures governing egg receipt, product preparation, storage and handling. The shelf life of each batch of raw egg product will also be limited to no more than 24 hours under refrigeration, after which the product must be discarded. The new egg safety measures will be legally enforceable by Local Government environmental health officers, as part food business licensing and inspection procedures.

The new requirements will not apply to businesses using commercially processed egg-based sauces and dressings, or to businesses that use pasteurised products such as egg pulp in lieu of raw eggs. When dining out, patrons are encouraged to ask whether raw eggs have been used to prepare mayonnaise, aioli and tartare sauces, so that they can make an informed choice. Consumers are also urged to check the use-by dates on egg cartons purchased from any source and to keep them refrigerated after purchase.
In the last edition of LGAT News, I talked about what a health and wellbeing (HWB) program involves. This included commonly agreed upon aims, the willingness of staff at all levels to be involved and setting a budget. What HWB programs cost is something that is often asked in the first few minutes of discussions, the answer being “how long is a piece of string?”

What it costs often depends on the aims of the organisation and whether the HWB program is imbedded in the organisation’s strategic plan. If an organisation considers a HWB program to be an integral strategy in supporting, attracting and retaining staff and for providing a healthy and positive workplace for employees, the budget will probably be quite generous. Other organisations may see a HWB program as one of many strategies for managing its people, in which case there are probably less funds available. Others will allocate a small budget because that is all they have. Given a willingness of staff to become involved, much can be done with a small budget. Here are three strategies or programs that can be implemented at minimal cost.

**Offer flexible work hours**

Flexible working hours reduces stress by enabling parents to pick up and drop off children from care or school easily, and provides time for meaningful exercise breaks.

**Get involved in community programs**

Get Walking Tasmania Week and Walk or Cycle to Work Day can be used as a catalyst for setting up regular programs. For this to be successful, it is important to recruit ‘champions to the cause’ who will plan walks and get people organised. To further encourage walking, less than $100 will allow you to purchase numerous walking books. Copies of local walk brochures can be left in the staff room or library.

**Workstation massage**

Massage is a great way to look after the back health of employees, particularly when the work is sedentary in nature. A masseuse generally costs $10 for 10-minute massage, a cost the employee is generally happy to pay. Alternatively, this may be subsidised by the employer. Workstation massage is offered for those who have sedentary desk jobs. Toxins and lactic acid build up in muscles which causes discomfort and sometimes pain, reducing productivity. A massage floods the area with fresh blood supply carrying oxygen and nutrients and removes any toxic build up. Recipients have reported “feeling more positive about going to work on massage days” as well as “taking a proper break that really eases the tension”.

Developing a HWB program need not be expensive - it is more about developing a different mind set and a more people friendly approach. Try these resources for a DIY approach:

- PPAC ‘Get Moving at Work’ kit at www.getmoving.tas.gov.au
- www.centre4activeliving.ca/category.cgi?c=2;s=10

Alternatively, an independent consultant can provide a neutral and varied approach to meet the needs of your workplace.

Jo Cordell-Cooper runs Active Solutions and Health Network which specialises in Health and Wellbeing in the Workplace. For enquiries, phone 6243 0552.
Skin Cancer Threat to Tasmanian Workers

Figures showing more than 800 Tasmanian workers suffer skin cancers every year have reinforced the need for sun protection. Employers have an obligation to help protect their employees from the risk of skin cancer and need to ensure that those who work outdoors are protected from ultraviolet radiation.

An estimated 30,000 Tasmanians work outdoors, including members of the construction and fishing industries, farm hands and council workers. While workers have a responsibility to safeguard themselves by using sun protection aids provided by employers such as sunscreen, hats, sunglasses and protective clothing, Workplace Standards Tasmania recommends that outdoor workers are supervised and receive awareness training on the potential dangers of over-exposure to the sun. The Tasmanian Cancer Council visits workplaces to educate employees on prevention measures and can supply information booklets and videos on request.

Employers requiring further information, should contact the Cancer Council helpline on 13 11 20.

Councils Urged to Make More Outdoor Areas Smoke-free

Councils are reminded to continue to promote good public health by making more outdoor areas smoke-free.

A kit launched on World No Tobacco Day last year by ASH Australia, The National Heart Foundation of Australia, The Cancer Council, the Australian Medical Association and the Local Government and Shires Association NSW, outlines what every local council needs to know about why and how to make crowded outdoor public areas smokefree. It consists of four fact sheets including information, research, council actions, sample policies, suggestions, questions and pictures.

A Cancer Council survey of 2,400 people in NSW revealed the potential for bans to reduce smoking rates, with 54% of smokers who had tried to quit saying that “seeing someone with a cigarette was a trigger to relapse”, while 40% said “smelling a cigarette was a trigger to relapse”.

Introducing smoke-free outdoor areas is a positive step that councils can take to protect the community from second-hand smoke, promote positive health messages, and support smokers who are trying to quit. 

For a copy of the kit, visit www.ashaust.org.au/lv4/SFoutdoorKit07.htm.
How Walkable is Your Neighbourhood?

DAVID FIELD, SPORT & RECREATION OFFICER
Bundaberg City Council

Have you ever wondered how walkable your neighbourhood is?

A great little website called Walk Score provides a score out of 100 for your neighbourhood. The closer your neighbourhood is to 100, the more walkable it is. Walk Score was developed to help home buyers, renters, and real estate agents find houses and apartments in great neighborhoods. Walk Score shows you a map of what’s nearby and calculates a Walk Score for any property. Buying a house in a walkable neighborhood is good for your health and good for the environment.

Walk Score calculates the walkability of an address by locating nearby stores, restaurants, schools, parks etc. Your Walk Score is a number between 0 and 100. The walkability of an address depends on how far you are comfortable walking - after all, everything is within walking distance if you have the time. Here are general guidelines for interpreting your score:

90 - 100 = Walkers’ Paradise
Most errands can be accomplished on foot and many people get by without owning a car.

70 - 90 = Very Walkable
It’s possible to get by without owning a car.

50 - 70 = Some Walkable Locations
Some stores and amenities are within walking distance but many everyday trips still require a bike, public transportation, or car.

25 - 50 = Not Walkable
Only a few destinations are within easy walking range. For most errands, driving or public transportation is a must.

0 - 25 = Driving Only
Virtually no neighborhood destinations within walking range. At least you can still walk from your house to your car!

One of the issues for us Aussie’s when searching on addresses in Australia, is that Walk Score only provides the walking distances in miles, not kilometers. However, you can always convert miles to kilometers to understand the distances better. The information on Walk Score may not be completely up-to-date or comprehensive for every country but take the time to check it out. You may learn something interesting about your neighbourhood!

To determine the walkability of your neighbourhood, visit www.walkscore.com.