

## **Epidemic investigation of typhoid fever in Nauru**

**The typhoid fever outbreak which recently hit Nauru was the subject of an epidemic investigation. This example of a regional response illustrates the importance of exchanging and sharing health information and of co-operation within PPHSN.**

Nauru experienced an outbreak of typhoid fever, which began in October 1998. However, the PPHSN Co-ordinating Body's Focal point only belatedly learned of the possible epidemic through a Pacnews report on 30 March 1999. The next day, a request for information was put out over PACNET to get confirmation of the news agency's report. On 1 April, Nauru's Director of Health Dr Godfrey Waidubu confirmed on PACNET that there was indeed a typhoid fever epidemic and requested assistance in the form of preventive education materials.

In mid-April, Michael O'Leary of the WHO Office, Suva; Tom Kiedrzyński and Yvan Soares of the SPC's PHS&CDC Section met in Suva to discuss the possibility of an epidemic investigation. With the agreement of Dr Godfrey Waidubu, they proposed that the Fiji School of Medicine be asked to send one of their students who was specialising in public health to Nauru. This student would carry out the epidemic investigation under the supervision of a CDC staff member. The study's objectives were to determine the extent of the epidemic and the transmission risk factors and to draft prevention recommendations.

On 15 April, Yvan Soares and Tom Kiedrzyński submitted an official request to the Fiji School of Medicine and received a positive response the very next day. On 6 May, courtesy of WHO funding, Dr. Berlin Kafoa, who was studying for a public health practitioner's diploma, was sent to Nauru. There, he met up with Dr Sonia Olsen of the CDC.

Together they carried out a retrospective study from 1 October 1998 to 10 May 1999, covering all those reported cases whose bacterial cultures had tested positive for either *Salmonella* spp or *Salmonella typhi*. The report on their epidemic investigation became available in early June. The results will be sent at a later date to all network members, but already they represent the first example of regional co-operation in epidemic investigations.

This kind of joint response is an excellent example of field epidemiological training as part of the Pacific Public Health Surveillance Network, and, as such, deserves to be highlighted.