Papua New Guinea and Niue health professionals address typhoid fever and other foodborne diseases

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Health professionals from various provinces of Papua New Guinea and Niue will attend a week-long training workshop on "Global Salmonella Surveillance" in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea, from 2 to 6 June 2008. Salmonella is a germ that can occur in food and can be a cause of foodborne diseases, one of which is typhoid fever. You get such diseases by consuming contaminated food or drink.

"Typhoid fever is a major public health problem in Papua New Guinea. It is among the top 10 causes of death in the country," says Dr James Wangi, Pandemic Preparedness Specialist at the Port Moresby office of the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC).

Typhoid fever can be treated with antibiotics, but the tests necessary to detect the disease and identify the causative germ are often not available in the laboratories of Pacific Island countries and territories (PICTs). The training will provide the participants from PNG and Niue with the skills to detect different types of Salmonella organisms and in addition investigate outbreaks of typhoid fever and other foodborne diseases. The courses will include practical laboratory work, case studies and computer exercises on outbreak investigation and response.

This is the second regional training of this nature. The first workshop, in 2006, brought together laboratory and public health specialists from 12 PICTs: Cook Islands, Fiji Islands, French Polynesia, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, New Caledonia, Palau, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu.

Typhoid fever is not confined to Papua New Guinea. In the last 10 years, outbreaks of typhoid fever have also been reported in Fiji, Samoa, Tonga, Nauru, Vanuatu and Marshall Islands.

The training is being organised by SPC in collaboration with the Port Moresby General Hospital, the National Department of Health of Papua New Guinea, the World Health Organization, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (WHO Global Salmonella Surveillance team), OZ Foodnet, the Pasteur Institute of New Caledonia (IPNC), James Cook University (Queensland) and the Institute of Environmental Science and Research of New Zealand. It is mainly funded through the Pacific Regional Influenza Pandemic Preparedness Project coordinated by SPC and financed by AusAID, NZAID, and the French Pacific Fund via IPNC.

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