



## Australian Government

### Department of Health

CHIEF MEDICAL OFFICER

#### Progress Report on Lyme Disease in Australia

On 20 August 2015 I wrote to you about Lyme disease in Australia and provided you with a progress report.

The department remains concerned about many Australians suffering a chronic debilitating illness which they associate with a tick bite. My colleagues and I have closely followed the research being undertaken in Australia, in particular keeping a watchful eye on that being undertaken at Murdoch University and the Marie Bashir Institute.

While debate continues on the nature of the chronic debilitating illness including its cause, diagnosis and treatment, all very much agree that tick bite prevention must remain a central focus.

Please find attached an update on the Department of Health's recent activities on Lyme disease and on the research from Professor Peter Irwin at Murdoch University.

While I am now finishing my term as CMO, the department will remain engaged with the patient community including their supporters as well as the medical profession. Should you have any questions please contact Dr Gary Lum ([Gary.Lum@health.gov.au](mailto:Gary.Lum@health.gov.au)).

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads 'Christopher J. Baggoley'.

Professor Chris Baggoley, AO  
*BVSc (Hons), BM BS, BSocAdmin, FACEM*

Monday, 11 July 2016

Attachment:  
Progress Report on Lyme Disease in Australia

## CMO's Progress Report on Lyme Disease in Australia

### *Research*

The Department of Health welcomes the latest two<sup>1,2</sup> publications from Professor Peter Irwin and his team from Murdoch University. This Australian Research Council funded work has provided new insight into the microbiome of some Australian tick species. This includes the identification of new bacterial species including a potential new clade in the genus *Borrelia*.

While no Lyme disease *Borrelia* bacteria have been found in Australian ticks, the finding of this new *Borrelia* sp. in ticks collected from wild echidnas, is notable. The clinical significance of this finding is still to be determined and should not be overstated. The department will remain engaged with Professor Irwin to consider the implications of this research for human health in Australia. It is anticipated that further research will be published later in 2016.

The department is also aware of work being conducted by NHMRC Fellow, Professor Edward Holmes. In his submission to the senate inquiry, Prof. Holmes described some recent findings and the characterisation of a new virus from ticks that had bitten humans<sup>3</sup>.

### *Parliamentary Inquiries*

The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Health conducted an inquiry into "Chronic Disease Prevention and Management in Primary Health Care" with a special hearing on tick-borne and Lyme disease-like illnesses. The committee tabled a report on 5 May 2016<sup>4</sup> which the department is now considering. The main recommendation is to consider a case definition for the chronic debilitating illness in question.

The Australian Senate's Community Affairs References Committee conducted an inquiry into "Growing evidence of an emerging tick-borne disease that causes a Lyme like illness for many Australian patients". The committee tabled a report on 4 May 2016<sup>5</sup> which the department is now considering. The main recommendations include 1. the continuance of the inquiry into the 45<sup>th</sup> Parliament of Australia, 2. education and awareness raising in the community and medical profession, and 3. ongoing consultation with relevant stakeholders.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0145449>

<sup>2</sup> <https://parasitesandvectors.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s13071-016-1627-x>

<sup>3</sup> Holmes, Edward. "Submission 546 Growing Evidence of an Emerging Tick-Borne Disease That Causes a Lyme Like Illness for Many Australian Patients." (25/03/2016 2016).

[http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary\\_Business/Committees/Senate/Community\\_Affairs/Lyme-like\\_Illness/Submissions](http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Community_Affairs/Lyme-like_Illness/Submissions)

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary\\_Business/Committees/House/Health/Chronic\\_Disease/Report](http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/House/Health/Chronic_Disease/Report)

<sup>5</sup> [http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary\\_Business/Committees/Senate/Community\\_Affairs/Lyme-like\\_Illness/Interim\\_Report](http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Community_Affairs/Lyme-like_Illness/Interim_Report)

The department's submission (number 495<sup>6</sup>) is included as an attachment for your consideration.

### *Prevention*

The department in collaboration with the National Arbovirus and Malaria Advisory Committee rewrote a tick bite prevention education product which is available on the department's website<sup>7</sup>. The department is aware of new clinical information about tick protein and mammalian meat allergy and safer approaches to tick removal. The department will continue to work with state and territory health agencies to incorporate new evidence-based techniques in tick bite first aid.

### *Communication*

The department continues to act as a point of contact within Australian Government for the Lyme disease community including medical practitioners and state and territory health authorities. The person to contact in the department is Dr Gary Lum whose e-mail address is Gary.Lum@health.gov.au

### Attachment

[Submission 495 from the Australian Government Department of Health](#) (can be accessed from the above link under Submission 495).

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<sup>6</sup> [http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary\\_Business/Committees/Senate/Community\\_Affairs/Lyme-like\\_Illness/Submissions](http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Community_Affairs/Lyme-like_Illness/Submissions)

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.health.gov.au/lyme-disease#preventing-treating>