

Joint Release

31 January 2017

Children to be screened due to malfunctioning dental equipment at Pukekohe Intermediate Dental Clinic

Specialist public health nurses from Counties Manukau Health (CMH) will be contacting all parents and caregivers of children who attended the Pukekohe Intermediate Dental Clinic from 13 September 2016 until it closed on 23 January 2017, to schedule appropriate screening. This follows the discovery last week that dental equipment at the clinic was not functioning as it should be.

Pukekohe Intermediate Dental Clinic is operated by the Auckland Regional Dental Service (ARDS).

An investigation is underway into the exact nature of the problem and how it occurred.

The problem means that there is a very small chance that children who had particular procedures may have been exposed to unsterilised water, possibly containing blood or saliva from other children.

Children who have had a procedure involving compressed air, a drill, extraction or suction, will be offered testing for blood-borne viral infections, in particular Hepatitis B, Hepatitis C and HIV. However, infectious disease specialists have indicated that the risk of cross-infection is very low as it is extremely rare for New Zealand children to have any of these conditions.

“It is critical for parents to understand the risk is very low. If we do find cases of pre-existing infection, then we will prioritise screening for those children who were treated on the same day.”

Dr Johnson, Chief Medical Officer for Counties Manukau Health, added, "Despite this very low risk, we will be contacting parents and caregivers of all the children affected to offer them an

appointment at the Specialist Clinics we have established to ensure they receive an assessment of risk, blood tests and immunisations if required, and to get all other relevant information.”

“A number of children, especially pre-schoolers, will have had only had a visual examination and because they have not come into contact with the problematic equipment, may not need blood tests. Some children may also need catch-up immunisations against Hepatitis B,” Dr Johnson said.

As a result of this incident, all Auckland Regional Dental Service dental clinics in the Auckland Region have been reviewed and the issue is only with the Pukekohe Intermediate Dental Clinic which treats children from Pukekohe and surrounding areas.

ARDS and CMH engineers are investigating how the problem could have occurred including involving a specialist maintenance company and the United States manufacturers of the equipment.

Dr Johnson says that incidents of this nature are extremely rare and parents should not let this affect their children's attendance at school dental clinics. “The problem occurred due to equipment assembly and is not related to the clinical practice of the dental staff at the clinic, or the high quality care given to children across Auckland.”

Our investigation will determine what longer term mitigations need to be put in place to ensure this type of fault doesn't occur in future.

ARDS and CMH understand that this incident will be distressing for the families involved and encourages them to contact Healthline on 0800 611 116 or talk to their GP if they require further information or support.