

## Gastro outbreak: Faulty test may have let bug through

By Victoria White



Hastings Mayor Lawrence Yule says council now believes Havelock North's water supply was likely to have been contaminated on August 8, five days before a positive indicator was received by council.

A faulty test may be why Hastings District Council was unaware for five days that the Havelock North water supply was contaminated.

In a talking point in today's *Hawke's Bay Today*, Lawrence Yule, Hastings mayor, said the council now believed the water was likely to have been contaminated with E.coli on August 8, five days before it received such an indication. This was because of the prevalence of the campylobacter disease in the Havelock North population.

Since the outbreak, around 4700 people have been affected by the illness, and two have died while having it.

Before the contamination the council were testing the water supply twice a week in line with New Zealand drinking water standards.

Although Mr Yule said the water was likely to have been contaminated on the Monday, a test the next day did not reveal any contamination.

"This means that people were drinking contaminated water for about five days before health authorities noticed a significant amount of illness and the council received an abnormal indicator test from a sample taken on Thursday," he said.

"We know the Tuesday test did not pick up a presence of E.coli which is the indicator organism. The reason for this is unknown."

A Hastings District Council spokeswoman said there was a possibility the test taken on Tuesday had been faulty.

Council was not considering any other possibilities for the test result at this stage.

Water treatment specialist Iain Rabbitts also said it was unlikely, but possible that the test simply did not detect any contamination.

A sample might only contain a small amount of water, when "thousands of litres are going past".

"Unless the concentration of the bacteria is such and the flow path is right there is a possibility you're just going to get a sample that's not got it," he said. "That doesn't mean it's not in the water, it just means it's not in that sample."

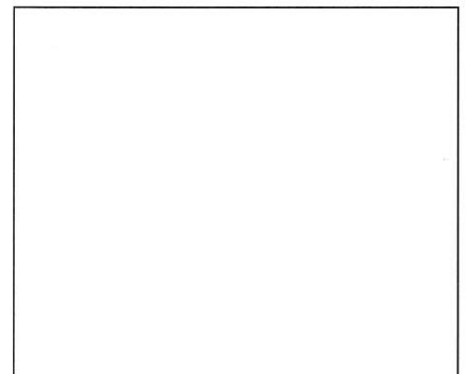
Although it was easy in hindsight to say the council should have done more, Mr Rabbitts said the council were working within a system.

"The only thing they could have done is they were doing the minimal level of sampling they had to do, maybe they could have done more," he said, "but if all the steps that were supposed to be done were done, then it's very difficult to say you should have done something different."

Mr Yule said had Tuesday's test picked up the contamination, the number of people affected would have been "dramatically lowered", as the water supply would have been chlorinated up to three days earlier than it did.

"Despite the best of intentions by regulators and systems the bugs have beaten the testing regime."

Without prejudging any investigation, he said the main contributing factor to the number of people affected was because nobody knew the water was contaminated.



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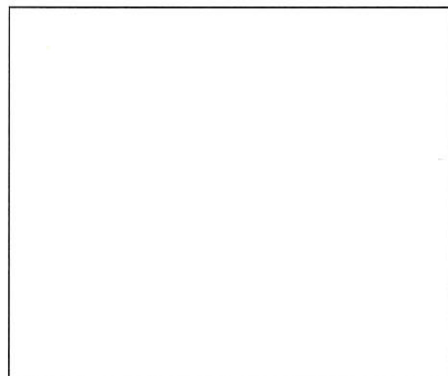
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In the third week since the outbreak, public meetings will be held tonight and tomorrow to update Havelock North residents on the contamination, and answer questions.

Ahead of this, a community forum, called H 2 Know, was held last night at the Common Room in Hastings.

A group of concerned residents - including Hawke's Bay Regional and Hastings District Council candidates, Tukituki Labour candidate Anna Lorck, former and incumbent councillors - gathered to share information, and concerns, and formulate a way to move forward with positive change around water in Hawke's Bay.

- A public meeting will be held at 5.30pm tonight, and tomorrow, at the Riverbend Bible Church, 354 Te Aute Rd, Havelock North. For those unable to attend a live streaming on the internet has been set up, at [www.riverbend.org.nz](http://www.riverbend.org.nz).

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## 11 comments

This is denial of prudent duty by the HDC.

The HDC has known for 3 years that the bores on Brookvale Rd get contaminated from time to time. Why was bore No.3 shut off last year ? Because it was pumping out contaminated water no doubt.

Knowing that these bores pump out dodgy water, especially after heavy rain events, the HDC should have been testing this water daily, and taking more than one piddly sample. Give us break HDC, and start looking beyond what the minimum standards prescribe.

I hope the NZ Drinking Water Standard gets a total revision, and any water supply giving a hint of dodgy water should be required to do far more rigorous DAILY testing.

Paul-14 - 12:13 PM Tuesday, 30 Aug 2016

The problem with the government delegating the responsibility of a highly-technical operation such as a reliable city water supply to a city council is that the businesspeople typically found on these councils are unaware that they are unqualified to carry out the job themselves. This continuing shifting of blame Yule is spinning out simply demonstrates that he has no idea what he is doing from any perspective - technical, public relations and political.

All technical comment should come from the relevant experts, and only after all the data has been processed.

The only number I want to hear from Mr Yule is his retirement date.

Paul - Napier - 12:13 PM Tuesday, 30 Aug 2016

At the moment this is a public health issue. It is not a political game. Hawke's Bay Regional and Hastings District Council candidates should acknowledge that using the same (water testing) procedures by the same staff during this outbreak of contamination would have led to exactly the same unfortunate results. It is not time for playing political pass the parcel. The issue at the moment is to find the cause and put in place procedures to prevent this happening again. Leave the politicking until later.

akiwi - Hastings - 12:13 PM Tuesday, 30 Aug 2016

I think most people will find it impossible to believe this latest excuse and it still doesn't explain why they all took the weekend off before taking any proper action

horse - 12:13 PM Tuesday, 30 Aug 2016

I can't believe our water isn't chlorinated already. Do people think it's going to steal our souls? That's where the real denial problem is. Denying science and best practice.

3rd world.

I wonder when developed nations will come take our land... oh wait...

Steve b - 11:09 AM Wednesday, 31 Aug 2016

I know I can email these questions to the editor.

I'd still like to know when the water was sampled and tested prior to that unreliable test done on Tuesday 9 August.

Was it before or after the power cut on Saturday 6 August and do water tests ever get done in the weekends?

Did the back up generators kick in straight away when the submersible pumps in bores 1 & 2 likely failed in the power cut?

It seems to me that it's not likely that only one thing that went wrong in this fiasco as much as a whole house of cards tipping over to cause the biggest drinking water contamination event in recent NZ history.

dlsg - New Zealand - 12:55 PM Wednesday, 31 Aug 2016

Could someone else check this out.

Tell me if I'm wrong.

<http://www.health.govt.nz/system/files/documents/publications/drinking-water-standards-2008-jun14.pdf>