

SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE ON LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS
AUSTRALIAN CUSTOMS BORDER PROTECTION SERVICE

Question No. 31

Senator Barnett asked the following question at the hearing on 18 October 2010:

What are the protection measures that you undertake for and on behalf of your personnel to protect them from infectious diseases such as TB?

The answer to the honourable senator's question is as follows:

Marine Unit officers often work in areas where there is a risk of possible exposure to infectious diseases. As a duty of care, Customs and Border Protection offers comprehensive preventative measures to protect all of its Marine Unit officers as follows:

- a. All Marine Unit officers are provided with a "*Disease and Vaccination Guide*", which includes information on Tuberculosis (TB) and prevention;
- b. Education programs are provided by a medical doctor or paramedic prior to each northern deployment undertaken by the ACV *Ocean Protector* and the ACV *Triton*, our two largest vessels that are capable of carrying a number of illegal foreign fishermen and potential irregular immigrants;
- c. All Marine Unit officers are encouraged to have Customs and Border Protection-funded vaccinations for Influenza (annual), Polio, Typhoid, Hepatitis A and B, Measles, Mumps and Rubella, and officers also have access to personal protective equipment, including gloves, masks and antiseptic hand gel;
- d. Any transportees taken onboard that show symptoms of illness are considered high risk. They are isolated from other transportees and are immediately provided with a high filtration mask;
- e. All Maritime Enforcement Officers undertake annual medical testing, including Mantoux testing and Quantiferon gold testing for possible TB. Officers are tested for the presence of tuberculosis because there is no immunisation for it with the annual medical check being the risk mitigator; and
- f. All Maritime Enforcement Officers undergo chest x-rays every 2 years.

Instructions and Guidelines covering communicable diseases are available to all Customs and Border Protection officers. The "OHS Hazard Instruction and Guideline – Communicable Diseases" outlines communicable diseases that may pose a risk to officers during the course of their work; practical steps and tips that can be taken to manage the risk of exposure to communicable diseases and to develop local Standard Operating Procedures; guidelines for managing staff who have been exposed to, or have contracted, a communicable disease; and additional communicable diseases references.

Customs and Border Protection also seeks specialist advice when unforeseen health issues arise, such as with the Human Swine Influenza (H1N1), and implements measures to protect its officers. In the situation with H1N1 Influenza, advice was obtained and officers were advised of steps to be taken if staff reported ill for work with influenza like illnesses. These steps included isolation,

personal (sick) leave, and recommending that the officers contact their treating medical practitioner or state health authority and follow their advice.

A DVD titled “Prepared and Protected”, issued by the Department of Health and Ageing, was also distributed to all Marine Unit vessels in June 2009. This DVD provides practical information on the threat of infectious respiratory diseases and how to reduce their spread in the event of an influenza pandemic.