



# Environmental Health Indicators for New Zealand

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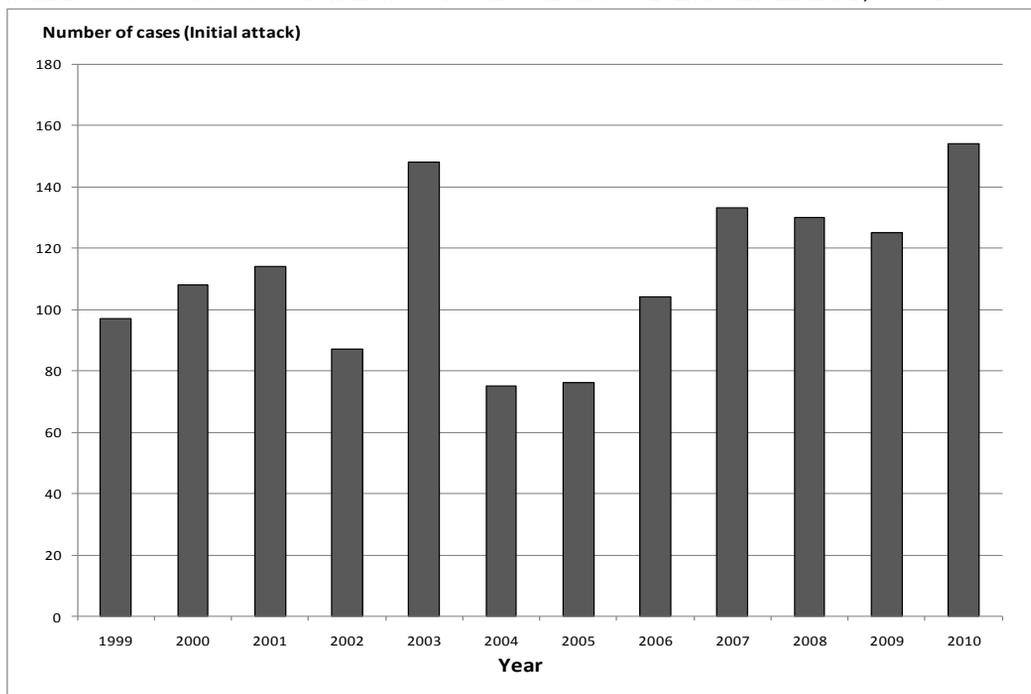
## NOTIFICATIONS OF RHEUMATIC FEVER IN NEW ZEALAND

Rheumatic fever is an acute bacterial disease caused by the microorganism *Streptococcus pyogenes*, or group A streptococci which may develop following streptococcal pharyngitis/tonsillitis. Streptococcal pharyngitis/tonsillitis, or 'strep throat' is most commonly spread via large respiratory droplets and through direct contact with carriers. Carriers may be asymptomatic, but those with acute strep throat are particularly likely to transmit infection (Heymann, 2004). If rheumatic fever does develop it would typically do so 2-3 weeks after initial infection, symptoms of which include fever, tiredness and stomach pain as well as inflammation and swelling of the heart, brain, skin and joints. If this inflammation causes scarring of the heart valves rheumatic heart disease may develop, which can lead to long term complications and even premature death (Ministry of Health, 2011).

This disease is notifiable in New Zealand. All cases diagnosed by doctors and/or laboratories are required to be notified to the medical officer of health in the region, who notifies the case to the national data collection (EpiSurv) administered by ESR, or directly to EpiSurv for further investigation.

Figure 1 presents the number of initial attack cases (not recurrent) of rheumatic fever in New Zealand, by year.

**Figure 1:**  
 NUMBER OF NOTIFICATIONS OF INITIAL ATTACK CASES RHEUMATIC FEVER IN NEW ZEALAND, 1999 - 2010



Source: ESR (2011)

### RHEUMATIC FEVER NOTIFICATIONS.

Notifications of rheumatic fever in New Zealand have remained relatively constant over the past 10 years, other than above trend numbers in 2003 and 2010 and below trend numbers in 2004 and 2005. The number of notifications of rheumatic fever reached a 10 year high in 2010 with 154 notifications.

### References

- Environmental Science and Research (ESR). 2011. Direct communication with statistics department.
- Heymann DL (ed). 2004. *Control of Communicable Diseases Manual* (18th edition). Washington, DC: American Public Health Association.
- Ministry of Health, New Zealand website. *Rheumatic Fever*. URL: <http://www.moh.govt.nz/moh.nsf/indexmh/rheumatic-fever>, accessed 12/8/2011.