

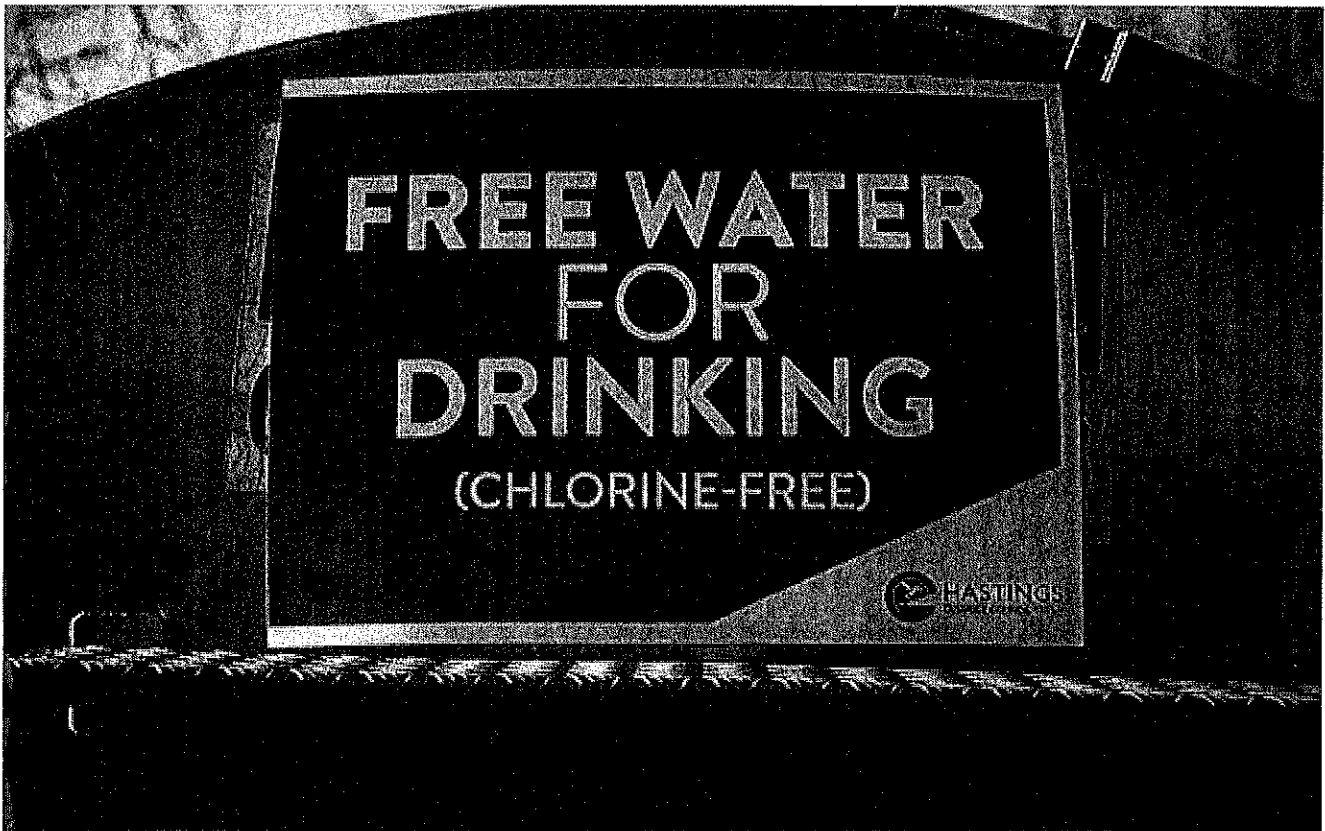


[NEW ZEALAND \(/NEWS/NATIONAL\)](#) / [HEALTH \(/TAGS/HEALTH\)](#)

## Havelock North drinking water emergency 'not needed'

6:27 pm on 1 September 2016

The Ministry of Health has defended its decision not to declare a drinking water emergency in Hawke's Bay, saying it was never needed and would not help locals get money for lost income.



A drinking water station set up during Havelock North's gastro bug outbreak. Photo: RNZ / Rebekah Parsons-King

More than 5000 people became sick in Havelock North during the outbreak - more than a third of the town's 14,000 population - and at least 500 of those cases were confirmed as due to campylobacter.

Havelock North woman Jessica Maxwell told RNZ yesterday a health emergency should have been declared

(<http://www.radionz.co.nz/news/national/312218/gastro-bug-fallout-'people-are-suffering'>) to help those out of pocket from the water contamination.

Labour Party health spokesperson Annette King said she also believed it should have been declared an emergency under the Health Act, which was possible if there were "reasonable grounds" of serious risk of harm.

The emergency should have been called by the Minister of Health on the day the contamination was discovered, she said.

Emergency should have been declared in Havelock North - Labour



"So you've got the hospital with the emergency department, people in intensive care, GPs being overworked - you had the indication this had been going on for a few days. That is when the minister was advised, he should have called a drinking water emergency. It would have then enabled a number of things to happen."

She said it would have avoided accusations that the Hastings District Council had failed to bring information to the attention of the Hawke's Bay Regional Council.

"What that emergency would have done is to allow a designated officer to pull together everything, to take control of the issues and enable - require - many things to happen and could have been working with all groups, but they were pretty much working across each other, by the sounds of it.

The situation was "highly political", Ms King said.

"Both ministers have tried to downplay it and I have no idea why, when they had the power to do something about it by calling an emergency, taking control of the situation, giving certainty and ensuring people were informed."

## 'Powers of compulsion'

But Dr Stewart Jessamine - the acting director of public health - defended the decision not to declare an emergency, saying everybody involved was already co-operating with the health authorities.

Dr Jessamine said the Health Act allowed for the declaration of a drinking water emergency if there was a serious risk of harm to the health or safety of any people drinking that water.

"This enables emergency powers to be invoked, such as requiring persons to take immediate steps to prevent or eliminate any risk to public health arising from a drinking water supply, requiring use of an alternative water supply or stopping any activity that may be contributing to the drinking water emergency," he said.

"While the declaration of a drinking water emergency allows those powers of compulsion to be invoked, these are unlikely to be required where individuals and agencies are co-operating with any public health response."

Public health officers already had a range of powers to compel compliance without an emergency being declared, Dr Jessamine said.

On the matter of compensation, he said the Health Act's scope was limited to "property required to be destroyed, or requisitioned as part of any drinking water emergency or outbreak".

"The Act does not provide for recovery of other losses, such as lost income, revenue or expenses incurred as a result of an emergency or outbreak," he said.

Amendments to the Act in 2007 required drinking-water suppliers to take "all practicable steps to meet the Drinking-Water Standards for New Zealand".