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As many meetings as community needs - mayor on gastric illness

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Hastings council will continue to share its information about the gastric outbreak, district mayor Lawrence Yule has told a second public meeting of about 200 people.

Second public meeting in Havelock North



When roughly 5200 people, more than a third of a town, get sick - they will want answers, sometimes faster than they can be given.

That is why the regional and district councils, along with the District Health Board, offered their most senior doctors and scientists to speak to Havelock North's residents and answer their questions, the mayor said.



Hastings District Council will not be lifting its boil water notice on Havelock North for at least a week.

The regional council's acting chief executive Liz Lambert diverted from her first presentation, trying to pre-empt some of the questions.

"Public speculation has linked the issue of water supply contamination with a range of other water management issues, such as the issuing of resource consents for water bottling and agricultural land use activities," she said.

"We acknowledge water quality in the Tukituki River is not good enough - it's not been good enough for a number of decades."

However, Tukituki River catchment's rules introduced in 2014, were among the strictest in the country, Ms Lambert said.

Despite that, residents still asked questions about the links between the river, farming and water contamination.



Hawke's Bay Regional Council acting chief executive Liz Lambert Photo: RNZ / Rebekah Parsons-King

Hastings mayor Lawrence Yule said he would hold as many public meetings as the community needed while it got to grips with the information.

"There'll always be conspiracy theories but my view of how we deal with that is by giving everybody the information," he said.

"We've been completely open and given everybody everything - warts and all - and that actually, in my view, is the best way of dealing with conspiracy theories."



Hastings District mayor Lawrence Yule speaks at the second meeting. Photo: RNZ / Rebekah Parsons-King

"We don't know all the answers here, we have a whole lot of information, we have some theories, we're trying to share that with people and be as upfront as we can."

And that body of information would continue to build as the councils investigated and the government inquired.

The district council said its hydrogeologists were investigating whether the clay around the bores shrunk in recent droughts, creating cracks in the ground which would let contaminated surface water into the aquifers.

The regional council said Central Hawke's Bay's oxidation ponds would be at risk of overflowing when the river was in flood, but partially treated water would be "distilled out over the end", and it was unlikely to have contaminated the Tukituki River and the aquifer.



Photo: RNZ / Rebekah Parsons-King

Other questions focused on the council's communication strategy.

Jerry Hapuku from the town's only kohanga reo said he was never notified about the contamination even though every other school was.

The meeting also heard from those for whom the illness was still fresh in their minds including a man whose wife ended up in isolation at the hospital, a woman who thought she had developed reactive arthritis and another woman who had been in hospital twice and taken four rounds of antibiotics.