Reviewer’s report

Title: Analysis of timeliness of infectious disease reporting in the Netherlands

Version: 1  Date: 26 November 2010

Reviewer: Trang Q Nguyen

Reviewer’s report:

This review of disease reporting to the Dutch Municipal Health Services is generally well-written and a helpful contribution to improving disease reporting in the Netherlands. The use of a corrected incubation period is an interesting methodology.

The manuscript could be improved in several ways. The text should be further edited; there are missing words and some sentences and paragraphs could be clarified to make the article easier for the reader to follow.

Major compulsory revisions:

1. The reason for comparing notification periods to one incubation period seems obvious but why compare the periods to two incubation periods?

2. What were MHS respondents asked if they were interviewed further by telephone?

3. Discussion – “Particularly as the surveillance system on gastroenteritis and food-poisoning has raised concerns” is a sentence fragment and needs to be clarified. Why are the concerns about this surveillance system important in relation to the timeliness of reporting?

4. Figure 2: “x” is not labeled in the figure itself

5. Figure 3: It is not clear which line is the “notification time” and which is the “incubation period” in each graph. The labels should also explain that the lines represent the median values of those variables.

6. Table 1: What is the total number of reports available for each disease for analysis?
   • If a substantial number of reports were missing data elements so that P0 and Pd could not be analyzed, then the number of reports not included in analyses should be addressed in the manuscript.

Minor essential revisions:

7. Remove mention of Osiris (unnecessary product placement)

8. Background – merge the sentence that starts with “Delays in the notification process” with the paragraph that starts with “Timeliness is also influenced by the
method of reporting.”

9. Background – In the paragraph that starts with “Timeliness is also influenced by the method of reporting.”, remove the 2nd sentence; the information in this sentence needs to remain only in the Results section.

10. Background – Remove the sentences about the law passed in December 2008. The law was implemented in the last month of the study period and is not relevant until the Discussion.


12. Results – Delete the sentence “The percentage of HAV infection cases reported within one and two incubation periods are 90.3% and 97.2%, respectively”.

- Merge the sentence that begins “In contrast” with the remaining sentences of this paragraph that includes “However, with correction for the period of infectiousness before disease onset….”

13. Results – the phrase “(figures between brackets in table1)” should be clarified, such as “(percentages in parentheses in the 2nd and 3rd data columns in table 1)”

14. Discussion – 2nd paragraph starting “Studies with comparable data on surveillance intervals…” should be moved to Background.

15. Table 1 – Re-name column labels as “Percentage Reported < 1IP” and “Percentage Reported < 2IP”

16. Table 2 – spell-out HAV in table title

Discretionary revisions:

17. Abstract: Methods – Insert sentence after 3rd sentence, such as “The intervals were compared to each disease’s incubation period.”

18. Abstract: Methods – Delete 2nd to last sentence about focus on hepatitis B infections. This detail is not addressed in the abstract and thus does not need to be mentioned in the abstract.

19. Results – Notification procedures – edit 2nd sentence to read more simply “Of these, 25 MHS had agreements with physicians to authorize direct reporting by one or more laboratories in their region.”

**Level of interest:** An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

**Quality of written English:** Needs some language corrections before being published
Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests.