



MEDIA RELEASE - 4 July 2007

**NEW ZEALANDERS' CHRONIC VITAMIN D LEVELS EXPOSES THEM TO
KILLER DISEASES**

A leading researcher from the University of Auckland says skin cancer campaigns may be causing New Zealanders to get too little Vitamin "D", with Maori, Pacific and South Asian peoples the worst off.

Robert Scragg told the Public Health Association conference at the university today that 90 percent of Vitamin D comes from sunlight.

"Optimum amounts of Vitamin D are around 80 nanomols per one litre of blood. Some think it is as high as 100 nanomols per litre. But European New Zealanders have an average of 51nmol/L, Maori about 42nmol/L and Pacific peoples 37, while levels in South Asian people are lower still" said Dr Scragg told the 320 public health workers.

He said international research indicates low Vitamin D levels may increase the risk of rickets and osteoporosis, breast and bowel cancer, heart disease, hypertension, diabetes, multiple sclerosis, tuberculosis and respiratory infections.

"What this means is that in our zeal to protect pale skinned Anglo-Saxon descendants from getting melanoma, we are putting darker skinned people – who are not susceptible to skin cancer anyway – in greater danger, than other groups, of getting a range of diseases that could be linked to low vitamin D levels."

Dr Scragg said New Zealand can do three things to help the chronic lack of Vitamin D: it can change the sun exposure public health policy so darker skinned people are aware they need sunlight, it can fortify foods such as milk, fruit juice or cereals, as happens in the United States, or it can increase the amount of Vitamin D in over the counter multivitamin pills.

"At present, the amount of Vitamin D in these pills is miniscule, enough to increase a person's Vitamin D by one or two nanomols. They could go as high as 2,000 international units which would increase Vitamin D by about 40 nanomols which is about how much New Zealanders would need for optimal health." Dr Scragg said.

--

For more information contact:

PHA Media Advisors

Liz Price 0276 957 744

Anton Blank 021 406 031