

Health protection

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The Health Protection Branch is responsible for developing an integrated program to protect the public against unsafe foods, drugs, cosmetics, and medical and radiation emitting devices; harmful microbial agents and technological and social environments deleterious to health; environmental pollutants and contaminants of all kinds; and fraudulent drugs and devices.

The branch contains six operational directorates — Foods, Drugs, Environmental Health, Laboratory Centre for Disease Control, Non-medical Use of Drugs, and Field Operations. It is responsible for enforcing the Food and Drugs Act and Regulations, the Narcotic Control Act and Regulations, the Proprietary or Patent Medicine Act, and the Radiation Emitting Devices Act and Regulations.

Food. Standards of safety and purity are developed through laboratory research and maintained by means of a regular and widespread inspection program. The inspection of food-manufacturing establishments plays a major role in the production of clean, wholesome foods containing ingredients that meet recognized standards. Changing food technology requires the development of methods of laboratory analysis to ensure the safety of new types of ingredients and packaging materials. The Food and Drug Regulations list chemical additives that may be used in foods, the amounts that may be added to each food, and the underlying reason. Information on new additives must be submitted for careful review before they are included in the permitted list. Considerable emphasis is placed on studies to ensure that the levels of pesticide residues in foods do not constitute a health hazard. The effect of new packaging and processing techniques on the bacteria associated with food spoilage is also of special concern.

Human nutrition. Following the Nutrition Canada survey in 1972, steps have been taken to increase the fortification of food with vitamins and minerals. Revised dietary standards have been published and a new Canada Guide appeared in 1977, together with other material informing the public about good nutrition and stressing its importance in the prevention of disease.

Drugs. The Health Protection Branch regulates the manufacture and distribution of drugs in Canada. The conditions under which drugs are to be manufactured are described in the Manufacturing Facilities and Control Regulations. They relate to facilities, employment of qualified personnel, quality control procedures, maintenance of records, and a suitable system to enable a complete and rapid recall of any batch of drugs from the market. Pharmaceutical plants are regularly visited by inspectors to ensure that the drugs produced meet the quality standards required for sale in Canada.

When a new drug with unknown properties is to be placed on the market, the manufacturer is required by law to provide specified information, including a quantitative list of all ingredients, evidence of safety and effectiveness, the formulation of dosage forms and reports of any adverse effects. This information is studied carefully to ensure that the drug is safe and effective for the purposes claimed. Even after a new drug is on the market, its sale can be banned by the Health Protection Branch if the Drug-Adverse-Reaction Reporting Program indicates that the drug is unsafe and injurious. Plants manufacturing biological products such as serums and vaccines must be licensed according to specifications of the Food and Drug Act and Regulations, whether they are located in Canada or abroad.

Another major activity of the branch is the Quality Assessment of Drugs program to enable the public to purchase high quality drugs at a reasonable price. This program includes integrated action involving inspection of manufacturing facilities, assessment of claims and clinical equivalency and quality of competing brands, and provision of information to provincial governments, professionals, and the general public.

Non-medical use of drugs. Objectives of the Non-medical Use of Drugs Directorate may be described under four main headings: prevention, to develop