

### What's New with Epi-X

**John Ward, M.D.**  
Director, OSHC

Currently, staff of Epi-X, the Health Alert Network (HAN), and the MMWR are working to coordinate alerts and messages sent from CDC during public health emergencies. Specifically, CDC will use Epi-X to send alerts (e-mail, pager, and phone) during such emergencies — particularly after business hours — to exchange sensitive and provisional information. Consequently, it is now more important than ever for Epi-X users to provide, and periodically update, their

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### Welcome to The Epi-X Exchange

Rossanne M. Philen, M.D., M.S. Epi-X Medical Director

Our quarterly newsletter has been created to keep Epi-X users updated and informed about a number of key topics, including:

- Revisions or improvements to existing features,
- Frequently asked questions,
- User training and orientation,
- Future project developments, and
- User feedback.

Since December 2000, Epi-X users have been exchanging secure and privileged public health communications using this unique Web-based system; the nation's only source of information that is both protected and available to public health profes-

sionals nationwide. Epi-X brings together the collective expertise and surveillance capabilities of public health officials from every state, in a single, powerful tool designed to inform decision makers and public health professionals of the latest epidemiologic developments.

For example, were you aware that Epi-X is the only system that links the command centers at HHS and CDC with state bioterrorism surveillance and response programs? Epi-X users are the top public health professionals in the



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### Exchanges with the Epi-X User Community

Susan Boyer, R.N.



Julie Rawlings, is the Texas Deputy State Epidemiologist. Julie has been a part of the Epi-X community from the very beginning, and assisted in the creation of Epi-X.

**Q. What prompted you to become an Epi-X user?**

**A.** I first heard about Epi-X a few years ago and was involved in the focus group that CDC put together to develop the system. As soon as I heard about what Epi-X would do, I knew I would use it and wanted to be a part of it. I was a ProMED user before, but thought the secure communications that Epi-X offers added a nice and needed element.

**Q. What role does Epi-X perform for you in your position as a Deputy State Epidemiologist?**

**A.** By using Epi-X, I know what's happening nationwide regarding outbreaks and epidemics, and I use Epi-X for day-to-day things as well. With Epi-X, I also have access to the contact data for my colleagues, and it's right at my fingertips. Also, through Epi-X Forum, I have the ability to pass information on to local and regional health departments quickly.

**Q. If Epi-X were to expand its services, what additional information or features would you like to see?**

**A.** A vision of mine is to import or duplicate Epi-X for my state. We want to try to create a state-based Epi-X and have purchased equipment, etc. We're talking to CDC about getting updated code. Our Texas system would start at the local level, funnel information to the state, and when appropriate, to CDC.

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## Faster *Epi-X* Alerting

Demetri Vacalis, Ph.D.

Emergency *Epi-X* notification is now over seven times faster with the installation of a new Dialogic communication server. The server, which uses 161 digital telephone lines to call work, home, and cell phone numbers, can deliver 2,000 thirty-second phone messages in less than 7 minutes. This server also sends messages to alpha and numeric pagers at an equally fast rate. *Epi-X* medical epidemiologists have noted that Dialogic notification software has improved this secure communication system's capability to rapidly notify all *Epi-X* users or other key users, such as State Epidemiologists, within a few minutes. This increased capacity provides additional lines for users who are paged to call a toll-free telephone number to receive an urgent *Epi-X* message. An EIS supervisor can also notify all on-call EIS Officers during an emergency by placing one telephone call. Once everyone has been notified, the supervisor receives an e-mailed report of the notification results.

Effective notification, however, depends on the quality of locating information provided. Now, more than ever, public health professionals are on the frontline of the nation's defense, and CDC must be able to contact them 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Consequently, an accurate database of contact information must be maintained. We encourage all users to update their work, home, cell, and pager information by clicking on the 'My Profile' tab at the top of the *Epi-X* Website homepage, at <https://epix.cdc.gov/epix/myhome.asp>. Changes to your profile can be made as often as needed. Once submitted, the changes are captured instantaneously. This new and rapid alerting feature has greatly facilitated the capacity of *Epi-X* to efficiently notify public health professionals during an emergency. **E**

## New Features on *Epi-X*

Janet Fath, Ph.D.

*Epi-X* made several upgrades in the first quarter of 2003. Posted reports are now more readable. Error checking has been improved to help prevent data entry errors where possible and to provide guidance for resolving errors when they occur. The *Epi-X* Directory has changed substantially to make it easier to find your *Epi-X* colleagues and send them e-mail messages.

Important tips for using the *Epi-X* Directory

- When you enter a name as search criterion, *Epi-X* will check both the first and last name fields. Entering "Ward" will return a list of users whose first or last names contain that string. Possible matches, for example, would be Edward Riggs, Chris Wardlow, and John Ward.
- You can enter multiple names in the "Name" field as long as you separate each name by a comma. Entering "Chris Ward" will likely find no matches, but "Chris, Ward" would find several.
- You can now search for users by job title. For example, you could enter "State Epi" to see the names of the State or Territorial Epidemiologists and their designees who are members of *Epi-X*.
- If you wish to send an e-mail message to several users whose names were returned as matches, you can quickly select their names. To select contiguous names, select a name, scroll to the last name you want to add, and hold down the "Shift" key while pressing the left mouse button. To select noncontiguous names, hold down the "Ctrl" key while pressing the left mouse button.

We look forward to hearing more about your user experiences and suggestions on how we can make *Epi-X* an even better tool for you urgent communicators! **E**

## What's New [cont. from pg. 1]

contact information in the *Epi-X* directory. In the coming months, HAN messages will also be available on the *Epi-X* Website. As you may realize, CDC benefits from the exchange of information shared by *Epi-X* contributors, and I encourage you to continue posting information on *Epi-X*. The collaboration between HAN and *Epi-X* staff is part of an ongoing effort to improve CDC-based communications during public health emergencies. **E**

## The *Epi-X* Team

### Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Julie L. Gerberding, M.D., M.P.H., Director

### Epidemiology Program Office

Stephen B. Thacker, M.D., M.Sc., Director

### Office of Scientific and Health Communications

John Ward, M.D., Director  
 Maria Parker, Deputy Director  
 Demetri Vacalis, Ph.D., Associate Director  
 Hobie Vaughn, Associate Director,  
 Clinical Communications

### *Epi-X*

Rossanne M. Philen, M.D., M.S.,  
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### User Support

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 Robbie Justice  
 Dylana Wilson

### Information Technology

Terry Puls, Project Manager  
 Felix Bondar  
 Joshua Gough  
 Dennis Probst  
 Keith Robinson

## Exchanges [cont. from pg. 1]

**Q.** What can you tell me about your user experience?

**A.** My experience has been very good although I have experienced problems with renewal certificates, and I am currently experiencing difficulties with importing and exporting certificates. I do look forward to a time when we can use USB technology for *Epi-X* and perhaps eliminate this worry.

**Q.** Would you recommend *Epi-X* to a colleague?

**A.** I do. Every day. Which might sound like an overstatement, but we do promote *Epi-X* at all levels in Texas—local, regional, and statewide.

*Thank you, Julie. Your support of Epi-X is very important to us. —SB*



Rana Hajjeh, MD, is an *Epi-X* user and a Medical Epidemiologist in the Division of Bacterial and Mycotic Diseases, National Center for Infectious Diseases, CDC.

**Q.** I understand you're a relatively new *Epi-X* user. How long have you been using the system?

**A.** I have been using the system for 4 months.

**Q.** What made you decide to become an *Epi-X* user?

**A.** We had an outbreak investigation in my branch and wanted to post information about it on *Epi-X*. Before, I felt out of the loop. I thought *Epi-X* would give me information about other outbreaks and keep me up to date on public health events.

**Q.** How often do you log on to the system to read reports?

**A.** I open the daily e-mail every day, and I log on whenever a report interests me. So, I access the system at least once a week or every other week—more often, if something gets my attention.

I don't know how this might be simplified, but it would be nice if we could automatically get into *Epi-X* or use a CDC network password to simplify the process.

**Q.** What do you like best about *Epi-X*?

**A.** I like the fact that *Epi-X* keeps you updated, and I like the fact that there are repeated updates about the outbreaks. It's different from EPI-AIDs, which are issued and then you don't hear much follow up about them until Grand Rounds, which happens later, sometimes the following year.

**Q.** Would you recommend *Epi-X* to other CDC epidemiologists? If so, what would you say to them to encourage them to use *Epi-X*?

**A.** Yes definitely, I have already recommended *Epi-X* to others in my group as a good way to stay up to date.

**Q.** In just a few words, how would you summarize your overall experience with *Epi-X*?

**A.** Overall, it's been very good. The e-mail alerts are reasonable, relevant, and not too many in number. My only problems were with my first set-up. Someone had to come help me sign up. If I had not been persistent by nature, I might have given up.

*Rana, thank you for taking time to speak with me about Epi-X. Your experiences are similar to those of many of our users. I'm glad you're a member of our user community. —SB* 

## New *Epi-X* Staff

Carlos Alonso

**Rossanne M. Philen, M.D., M.S.  
Medical Director**

Rossanne joins our family as Medical Director of *Epi-X*. In this position, she will manage the medical and editorial operations of the system. Dr. Philen received her M.D. from Emory University School of Medicine in 1981 and served as an Epidemic Intelligence Service (EIS) Officer from 1988 to 1990.

Before accepting her appointment to *Epi-X*, Dr. Philen worked at the National Center for Environmental Health as the Associate Chief of the Health Studies Branch. Dr. Philen has authored more than 100 publications, including publications in *the American Journal of Epidemiology*, *Archives of Family Medicine*, *JAMA*, *MMWR*, and *New England Journal of Medicine*. She serves as an advisor to the government of Spain and to the World Health Organization, and has been a lead CDC disease investigator in collaboration with the Pan American Health Organization and the Cuban Ministry of Public Health. Dr. Philen retains membership in several professional organizations and speaks three languages.

**Carlos R. Alonso, Health  
Communications Specialist**

Carlos joins the *Epi-X* team to help market the system, recruit new users, and establish broader acceptance of *Epi-X* functionalities. He entered into government service in 1983 and brings a rich and diverse background as a Public Health Advisor with him to *Epi-X*. He worked in the early 1980s as a Sexually Transmitted Disease Investigator in New York City. Later, he held public health-related assignments in Puerto Rico and California, where he worked with childhood and adult immunization initiatives. Carlos also implemented a nationwide recruitment strategy for the Epidemic Intelligence Service (EIS) program.

**Renee C. Bruner, *Epi-X* Health Trainer**

Renee joins the *Epi-X* team as an *Epi-X* Health Trainer. Before joining the *Epi-X* team, she was the Team Leader for Web Initiatives at the American Cancer Society, where she worked in many different areas of Website development and training. Renee's diverse background includes a Bachelor of Science Degree from Florida State University and more than 10 years experience in the telecommunications industry. In her new position as *Epi-X* Health Trainer, Renee will also

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United States, and include State Health Officers, State Epidemiologists, State Public Health Laboratory Directors, State Public Health Veterinarians, and State Bioterrorism Coordinators. All Epidemic Intelligence Service Officers (EISOs) and key CDC personnel are also *Epi-X* users.

*Epi-X* users have exclusive access to essential reports about smallpox vaccination adverse events, the recent outbreak of severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS), and other ongoing concerns of vital interest and importance, such as West Nile Virus. During these challenging times, it is critically important to ensure that scientists and epidemiologists from CDC and state and

local health departments are free to communicate efficiently and rapidly with each other. *Epi-X*, CDC's secure communications network, was created specifically to meet this need and to create a mechanism for communicating time-sensitive public health information.

A crucial part of the *Epi-X* communication process involves immediate notification of state and local public health officials during multijurisdictional or critical public health-related events, via telephone, pager, or e-mail. For this to be effective in an emergency, users must routinely review and update their personal profiles.

Today, *Epi-X* has positioned itself as a powerful tool to help key public health

officials prepare for and rapidly respond to events involving biological or chemical attack or other public health emergencies, wherever and whenever they might occur.

I look forward to hearing from the *Epi-X* community, and I thank each of you for your suggestions, input, and cooperation in fulfilling the requirements of our mission-critical efforts to safeguard the health of the American public. **E**

## New Staff [cont. from pg. 3]

assist in public relations. Renee is working directly with some of the nation's top public health professionals to promote and facilitate the use of *Epi-X* and to provide other forms of training and materials to our users. **E**

## From the Director

John Ward, M.D., Director OSHC

I hope you enjoy learning about how *Epi-X* is changing to help you communicate more efficiently, and how your public health colleagues are benefiting from *Epi-X*. As you know, this secure communications system has grown tremendously since it was launched in December 2000. Currently, more than 1,400 health officials have been granted access to *Epi-X*, and hundreds of disease reports are posted annually. *Epi-X* is an

increasingly integral part of CDC's communication plan. As the system grows, CDC will continue to look to the *Epi-X* user to determine how that growth can be managed to accommodate the needs of our public health partners. Thank you for growing along with us and providing such excellent feedback. I look forward to your continuing enthusiasm and participation. **E**

## Contact *Epi-X*

### For assistance with access and registration to the *Epi-X* site

*Epi-X* Help Desk Phone  
(404) 639-3762  
*Epi-X* Help Desk e-mail  
epixhelp@cdc.gov

### For help with preparing and posting a report

Darlene Rumph-Person (404) 639-4216  
Susan Boyer (404) 639-4896  
e-mail: epixeditor@cdc.gov

### For emergency and after hours questions

Editor-on-Call  
(866) 721-1226



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