

## EPIDEMIC INTELLIGENCE SERVICE

### WHAT IS THE PUBLIC HEALTH ISSUE?

- There is a growing need for specially trained epidemiologists to address current public health problems, as well as emerging and re-emerging infectious diseases, throughout the nation.
- As the events of fall 2001 demonstrated, the nation requires “rapid response” capability to meet the real and ongoing threats of terrorism and bioterrorism.
- CDC needs an available cadre of trained epidemiologists to provide technical assistance requested by local, state, and national governments.

### WHAT HAS CDC ACCOMPLISHED?

The Epidemic Intelligence Service (EIS) is a unique 2-year, post-graduate program that consists of service and on-the-job training for health professionals interested in epidemiology. Since 1951, about 2,500 EIS officers (CDC’s “Disease Detectives”) have graduated from the program. In addition to on-the-job training gained by investigating disease outbreaks, natural and man-made disasters, and other public health emergencies, the EIS program provides formal instruction to EIS officers through courses in epidemiology, biostatistics, public health ethics and law, evaluation of surveillance systems, scientific writing, and prevention effectiveness.

- In fall 2001, over 125 EIS officers were deployed—often multiple times—to help state and local health departments respond to the September 11th terrorist and anthrax attacks.
- The 2003 EIS conference brought together over 1,500 current EIS officers and alumni, other public health officials or researchers, and the media. Papers presented at the conference addressed a vast range of public health problems tackled by EIS officers, including the groundbreaking documentation of West Nile virus transmission through blood transfusions and organ transplants. That conference also included a special session on Sudden Acute Respiratory Syndrome.
- In 2003, EIS officers responded to 77 formal requests for epidemiological assistance in various locations (63 in the United States and 14 in other countries). Requests for assistance primarily concerned infectious disease problems. However, investigations also addressed environmental health issues, injuries, maternal and child health issues, and other problems.

### *Example of Program in Action*

In the summer of 2003, EIS officers played leading roles in the investigation of the multi-state monkeypox outbreak. These investigations, in collaboration with the Food and Drug Administration, state and local health departments, and other organizations, documented the first-ever appearance of this human illness in the Western Hemisphere and led to banning the importation and interstate transportation of imported exotic animals.

### WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS?

Implementing a plan to place an EIS officer or EIS-trained epidemiologist (Career Epidemiology Field Officer) in every state to help improve the public health infrastructure is a priority. Training for these officers has been expanded to include terrorism preparedness and emergency response. CDC also plans to partner with academia and state and local health departments to improve epidemiologic capacity.