

PUBLIC HEALTH READY

WHAT IS THE PUBLIC HEALTH ISSUE?

- Local response to public health emergencies in the earliest phases of an event may prove insufficient if surge capacity or adequate resources are lacking.
- Effective preparation for emergency response must include planning, workforce training, and ongoing performance evaluation through exercises and drills.

WHAT HAS CDC ACCOMPLISHED?

CDC supports a voluntary recognition and certification program, Public Health Ready, for Local Health Departments (LHDs) in collaboration with the National Association of County and City Health Officials. The program envisions “a public protected from bioterrorism, infectious disease outbreaks, or other public health threats and emergencies.” LHDs achieve recognition based on documentation of emergency response planning, competency-based staff training, and evaluation of agency performance through exercises and drills. The criterion was developed by a national advisory committee, which also coordinates peer-review.

Twelve local agencies of varying sizes, governance structures, and geographic areas were selected as the Public Health Ready program. Pilot sites each represents a collaboration of the local public health agency with emergency management, state partners, and a CDC-funded academic Center for Public Health Preparedness. Public Health Ready is designed to support achievement of national preparedness goals and complements CDC’s national, state, and local preparedness programs. Initial pilot sites are expected to complete certification by March 2004. Pending an independent evaluation, plans for a national roll out will be considered.

Example of Program in Action

Among the locations selected as pilot sites for the Public Health Ready program are the Allentown City Health Bureau, Allentown, Pennsylvania; Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services in Rockville, Maryland; Thurston County Public Health and Social Services Department, Olympia, Washington; Tarrant County Public Health, Fort Worth, Texas; Winnebago County Health Department, Rockford, Illinois and seven other LHDs. To date, state-wide or regional roll outs of the Public Health Ready model are under consideration in Texas, Iowa, Florida, Washington, and Massachusetts.

WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS?

As the pilot program nears completion, CDC will

- Evaluate the impact of the Public Health Ready program on LHDs’ emergency response preparedness.
- Consider expanding the Public Health Ready program to 25 sites and 4 to 5 programs.
- Disseminate best practices and lessons learned from the program nationally.