

## EPIDEMIC INFORMATION EXCHANGE

### WHAT IS THE PUBLIC HEALTH ISSUE?

The urgency of outbreaks, terrorist events, toxic exposures, and other acute public health events underscores the critical need for a reliable and accurate communications tool that supplies public health officials with up-to-the-minute reports, alerts, discussions, and assistance. A secure, Web-based communications network for public health investigation and response simplifies and expedites the exchange of routine and emergent public health information among CDC and other health agencies.

### WHAT HAS CDC ACCOMPLISHED?

In December 2000, CDC launched the *Epidemic Information Exchange (Epi-X)* as the nation's secure, Internet-based communications network for public health investigation and response. *Epi-X* provides public health officials throughout the United States with up-to-the-minute information, reports, alerts, and discussions regarding terrorist events, toxic exposures, disease outbreaks, and other public health events. When public health officials post reports to *Epi-X*, the information is shared rapidly with colleagues across many states and jurisdictions. This sensitive information is encrypted and secured from access by outside sources. Since its launch, *Epi-X* has posted over 2,400 reports of disease outbreaks, other new public health activities, and requests for epidemiologic assistance from CDC. As of August 2003, more than 1,800 federal, state, and local epidemiologists, laboratorians, and other designated health scientists use *Epi-X* in such capacities as

- Finding, notifying, and communicating instantly with colleagues and specialists regarding urgent public health events across a secure, encrypted, Intranet-based network.
- Creating reports to track information for outbreak investigations and response.
- Creating online conferences to disseminate and discuss topics such as terrorism response, anthrax investigations, and West Nile virus activity.
- Researching outbreaks and unusual health events through a flexible search interface.
- Alerting health officials by pager, phone, and e-mail of urgent events.
- Customizing their home Internet pages, information, and options to meet their specific needs.
- Requesting assistance to investigate epidemics from CDC online.
- Communicating simultaneously with command centers at the Department of Health and Human Services and CDC, as well as all state and large metropolitan terrorism response programs.

### WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS?

*Epi-X* is expanding secure public health communications capacity at the national level. To reach its full potential, *Epi-X* must increase the base of designated users to ensure rapid secure communications at all levels of the public health and safety workforces. CDC plans to integrate *Epi-X* more closely with disease monitoring systems, provide improved secure communications for response teams in the field, and provide intelligence regarding international outbreaks that might affect public health in the United States.