

Columbia Regional Learning Center Preparedness and Emergency Response Learning Center Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health

Columbia Regional Learning Center - Overview

The Columbia Regional Learning Center (CRLC) is a training center focused on providing preparedness and response training for the public health workforce. There is a pressing need for high-quality, validated instruction that is understandable, well retained, contributes to an integrated and coordinated public health emergency response system, and relates clearly to the roles that the public health workforce may be expected to play in an emergency or disaster. CRLC ensures access to such instruction through progressive technologies for distance learning, regional workshops, and Advance Teams. The Center's three operational units - Evaluation and Development; Production and Infrastructure; and Marketing, Communications, and Partnership will coordinate the process of turning the varied sources of input into products.

Partners

CRLC partners include the public health workforce of New York City and the states of New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, and Pennsylvania, Puerto Rico, and the US Virgin Islands for whom they develop corresponding trainings addressing both core public health and preparedness competencies. The CRLC designs training activities and competency-based educational tools specifically requested by partners.

National Network of Learning Centers

CRLC is part of a network of training centers, called Preparedness and Emergency Response Learning Centers (PERLC), which is funded by the CDC. The PERLC serve in a national capacity to meet the preparedness and response training and education needs of the US public health workforce. The PERLC provide competency-based training to state, local, and tribal public health authorities within defined service areas. In doing so, PERLC provide specialized training, education, and resources, in addition to exercising consultations for partners on request. PERLC are acknowledged for their unique capacity to adapt and tailor preparedness training to meet stakeholder requirements. The PERLC are established within the Council on Education for Public Health (CEPH)-accredited schools of public health and serve as an important national resource to meet the requirements of the Pandemic and All-Hazards Preparedness Act (PAHPA), Sec. 304 (d). <http://healthyamericans.org/reports/bioterror07/PAHPAPublicLaw.pdf>

Key Activities

CRLC provides online certification, webinars, and lectures designed for individuals working in various health systems; this may include, but is not limited to health care, public health, home health, Medical Reserve Corps (MRC), community health, regional learning centers, and emergency management. All of the CRLC's certificate courses are based on standards set by CDC Public Health Preparedness and Response Competencies and Public Health Emergency Preparedness Capabilities.



Key Accomplishments

The Suffolk County Department of Health Services Embed Project

An “All-in-One” Digital Point of Dispensing (POD) Training

In late 2011, the CRLC teamed up with the Suffolk Department of Health Services DOHS to meet the health department’s most urgent preparedness training need: a POD training using minimal staff resources. The result of this collaboration was a state-of-the-art digital POD curriculum. Previously, all POD training in Suffolk County was face-to-face and required up to eight staffers from the Preparedness and Response Division. Collaborating closely with The Suffolk DOHS, the CRLC has developed a self-paced, self-contained digital POD training that maintains the same level of POD training standards while using less staff time and fewer department resources. For added simplicity all training expertise and materials are contained in a single computer-based resource. PowerPoint slides were updated with new content and a modern look, and then augmented with a modular format including section tests, virtual walk-thru of a POD using new educational platforms, high-definition time-lapse video as a teaching tool, and an interactive game-show themed final exam.

Regionalism: Thinking Outside the Box and Outside the Border

Catastrophic public health emergencies often transcend geopolitical boundaries, whether they are infectious diseases that spread through multiple population vectors, chemical or radiological exposures, or mass evacuations. Public health providers need to consider the regional impacts or consequences of public health emergencies and to plan accordingly.

CRLC developed a five-step strategy for addressing these issues of regional planning and coordination. The first step was to identify a regional catchment area coexisting with the Department of Homeland Security’s Regional Catastrophic Planning Team. This includes four states, 28 counties, and New York City. The second step involved the education of individual jurisdictional public health actors concerning the contours of the overarching region and the CRLC strategy for supporting regional learning and coordination. The third step was planning a multi-region workshop. This multi-region workshop focused on regional public health consequences of a nuclear power plant meltdown. Participants also investigate appropriate responses including medical counter-measure distribution, mass evacuation, and crisis communication. The fourth step supported and advanced regional planning while the fifth and final step created an online course on regional planning using public health hazard and vulnerability assessments. The effectiveness of the strategy was determined by the uptake of course opportunities, and ultimately, by the incorporation of such regional thinking into jurisdictional public health preparedness and response plans.

Japan Just-in-Time Training & Resources

In the aftermath of Japan’s earthquake, tsunami, and radiological crises in March 2011, a number of US public health practitioners and planners examined the implications of these cascading failures for domestic preparedness. Within two days of the initial earthquake and tsunami, the CRLC developed a web-based portal, featuring an updated version of a “Rad 101” course that the Columbia CPHP had developed previously. Within 10 days, the CRLC sponsored an educational “town hall” for the Columbia University Health Sciences community and interested media (The New York Times covered the event). Lectures from the event were recorded and hosted on the CRLC website. This web portal drew 3,939 online readers who learned new “just-in-time” training resources pertaining to the March 11, 2011 Tohoku earthquake and tsunami. Dr. David J. Brenner, Director of the Center for Radiological Research at the Columbia University Medical Center, provided a 30-minute primer on radiation exposure, addressing the scientific facts and common misconceptions. Dr. Eric J. Hall, Professor Emeritus of Radiation Biophysics at Columbia University, addressed the differences between ionizing and non-ionizing radiation, differences between exposure and contamination, the biological effects of radiation, and methods utilized to keep exposure as low as reasonably achievable. Dr. Richard Garfield, Senior Investigator and Affiliated Faculty of the Columbia Regional Learning Center addressed issues face by first responders when entering Japan. All of these lectures were specifically developed for the mid-level public health workforce. See: <http://www.ncdp.mailman.columbia.edu/japanearthquake.html>.

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CDC Preparedness and Emergency Response Learning Centers (PERLC)

For more information about the PERLC program please email us at perlcprogram@cdc.gov or visit our website at <http://www.cdc.gov/phpr/perlc.htm>.