

# CDC in Panama



The Center for Global Health and Prevention (CDC) has been collaborating with public health institutions in Central America since the 1960s. Through these alliances CDC has been able to address priority public health burdens in Panama and throughout the region. CDC's work in Panama addresses HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis (TB), influenza preparedness detection and response, field epidemiology training, and emerging infectious diseases. CDC is also providing assistance to strengthen Panama's health systems by increasing the technical skills of epidemiologists in the region.

## Staff

CDC office (physical presence)  
1 U.S. Assignee  
No Locally Employed

## At a Glance

Population: 3,571,200  
Per capita income: \$12,180  
Life expectancy at birth  
women/men: 79/74 yrs  
Infant mortality rate:  
17/1000 live births

Source: Population Reference Bureau Fact Sheet, 2011

## Top 10 Causes of Death

1. Ischaemic heart disease 12%
2. Cerebrovascular disease 11%
3. Diabetes Mellitus 6%
4. Perinatal conditions 6%
5. Lower respiratory infections 4%
6. Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease 3%
7. Road traffic accidents 3%
8. Prostate cancer 3%
9. Violence 2%
10. Stomach cancer 2%

Source: WHO World Health Statistics, 2006



## HIV/AIDS

One model program in progress is the HIV and sexually transmitted infections (STI) surveillance and control program focusing on most-at-risk populations, better known by the Spanish derived acronym VICITS. It is an HIV prevention strategy combining STI diagnosis and treatment, condom promotion, behavioral change, and an information system to monitor the impact of the project. The comprehensive program targets sex workers, men who have sex with men, and people living with HIV/AIDS. The program activities include strengthening STI management through training of health care personnel, strengthening counseling for risk reduction and condom promotion, and improving laboratory STI and HIV diagnostic capacity through training and provision of equipment and reagents. The project provides reproductive health services and outreach activities to improve coverage and compliance with follow-up visits. CDC promotes the establishment of monitoring and evaluation systems for surveillance and control of HIV/AIDS. These systems enable partners to use information when making decisions as well as estimating and disseminating HIV results. CDC will evaluate the national HIV algorithm in Panama, promote the use of rapid tests for a more efficient HIV diagnosis, and implement new national algorithms based on assessment findings.



## Influenza

CDC continues to support the national surveillance sentinel network in Panama in collaboration with the Gorgas Memorial Institute. The current number of cases, associated risk factors, and health care utilization practices for influenza-like illnesses and severe acute respiratory illnesses were estimated during 2011 in David, Chiriquí. CDC also supports the new web-based platform for surveillance information systems. In addition, the implementation of software for data integration in the Minister of Health (MoH)'s office was conducted. The CDC guidance for respiratory disease surveillance was implemented in 2011, which integrates the efforts required for surveillance of influenza, pneumococcus, and other respiratory viruses.

## Field Epidemiology Training Program (FETP)

The FETP in Panama is among the newest in the region and is coordinated from the Department of Epidemiology at the MoH. Although it is new, it has led the way in the region in gaining institutional acceptance and officially becoming a country-owned program with its own modest line-item in the MoH annual budget. Trainees have been very active and have participated in important outbreak investigations of various diseases including hospital-acquired infections, hemorrhagic dengue fever, severe acute respiratory infections, and an upper respiratory infection affecting vulnerable indigenous communities.

## Preparedness and Response

Over recent decades Central America has been struck by countless natural disasters and civil unrest emergencies. Due to the annual occurrence of such disasters CDC, in collaboration with the Central America Ministers of Health Committee (COMISCA) has developed and administered an emergency preparedness and response assessment that includes the functional areas of developing a public health emergency plan; command and control; communications infrastructure; public information and risk communication; logistic and operational processes; medical coordination; train, exercise, and evaluate; and surveillance systems. An emergency preparedness response was conducted in Nicaragua's Ministry of Health as part of a regional preparedness effort. An emergency preparedness response exercise was conducted in Nicaragua's Ministry of Health as part of this regional preparedness effort.

## Impact in Panama

- 35 students graduated from the basic-level Field Epidemiology Training Program (FETP) as of 2011.
- One FETP advanced-level trainee is currently Director of the National HIV/AIDS program and one is the FETP coordinator at the Department of Epidemiology in the Ministry of Health (MoH).
- 20 MoH personnel were trained in data collection using a new automated surveillance system.

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