Role in Public Health Preparedness and Response

When a disaster occurs, CDC must respond effectively and support international, national, state, local, tribal, territorial, and private sector public health emergency response partners. The Division of Emergency Operations (DEO) is responsible for the overall coordination of CDC’s preparedness, assessment, response, recovery, and evaluation prior to and during public health emergencies. This includes:

- Operating the CDC Emergency Operations Center for monitoring and coordinating response activities
- Developing response plans, training, conducting exercises, and evaluating CDC’s ability to respond following an exercise or a real incident

Operating a Command Center for Monitoring and Coordinating Emergency Response

A critical component of CDC’s work during an incident is to coordinate response activities and provide resources to state and local public health departments. DEO manages CDC’s Emergency Operations Center (EOC), which serves as the command center for monitoring and coordinating CDC’s emergency response to public health threats in the United States and abroad. Staffed around the clock, the EOC serves as CDC’s central point of contact for reporting public health threats and supports the HHS Secretary’s Operations Center. The EOC organizes CDC scientific experts in one location during an emergency response to analyze, validate, and efficiently exchange information as well as connect with public health emergency response partners. In addition, during public health emergencies, DEO manages requests for field and Incident Management System (IMS) staffing. To accomplish this task, DEO coordinates with CIO Emergency Coordinators, Incident Management staff, and CDC leadership to ensure all required staffing functions are identified and filled. Also, DEO maintains staffing reports and statistical data for each event.

To support state and local efforts during an emergency response, DEO coordinates the deployment of CDC staff and the procurement and management of all equipment and supplies that CDC responders may need during their deployment. Since its inception in September 2001, the EOC has responded to more than 40 public health threats, including hurricanes, food borne disease outbreaks, the 2009 H1N1 influenza pandemic, the 2010 Haiti earthquake, Deepwater Horizon, the Haiti Cholera outbreak, and the 2011 Japan Earthquake.

Planning, Training, Exercising, and Evaluating to Improve Preparedness

DEO is continually working to enhance CDC’s preparedness for all-hazard emergencies.

Planning. DEO leads the development of CDC’s emergency operation plans that describe the roles and responsibilities of different CDC offices, centers, and institutes during an emergency. CDC has an all-hazards base plan that outlines core roles and responsibilities for all types of responses, as well as plans for specific scenarios (e.g., hurricanes or anthrax incidents). DEO also develops specific agency public health emergency plans tailored to public health emergency responses (e.g., Haiti Earthquake/Cholera response).
Training. CDC prepares its responders by educating them on various guidance documents including the National Response Framework, the Incident Command System (ICS), and CDC Emergency Operations Center functions. DEO participates in preparedness training and also manages the National Planners Course, a program of instruction designed to provide CDC staff a comprehensive overview and understanding of the use of the Federal Planning and Development Process.

Exercising and Evaluating. CDC conducts exercises to verify and validate the agency's ability to respond rapidly and effectively to public health threats and emergencies. Recent CDC Public Health Preparedness and Response Exercises have ranged from the national level New Madrid Seismic Zone Earthquake Exercise to CDC-sponsored Natural Disaster and Pandemic Influenza Exercises. To improve CDC's response capabilities, DEO also provides the agency with an after action evaluation capability that assesses CDC capabilities during public health emergency responses during exercises.

Emergency Risk Communications. CDC’s emergency communication for all-hazards preparedness and response involves ensuring timely, consistent, targeted, and actionable information reaches the public and stakeholders during emergencies. There is also a need for agency-wide emergency risk communication planning and preparedness activities through selected channels that deliver national emergency and terrorism-related messages to the public (i.e., CDC’s Emergency Preparedness and Response Website, Health Alert Network, Epi-X, Clinician Outreach and Communication Activity Registry, non-governmental organizations and government partner channels, and professional list-servs.

For more information about CDC’s emergency preparedness and response activities, go to www.cdc.gov/phpr.