

The Role of Public Health in Emergency Preparedness and Response

Local public health authorities have the primary responsibility for the health of a community following a disaster.

Public Health Responsibilities

- ✓ Prevent epidemics and the spread of disease
- ✓ Protect against environmental hazards
- ✓ Prevent injuries
- ✓ Promote and encourage healthy behaviors
- ✓ Respond to disasters and assist in recovery
- ✓ Assure quality and accessibility of health services

How are these accomplished?

- ✓ Surveillance – monitor vital statistics, laboratory reporting, provider reporting, relationship with community
- ✓ Investigation – response to any deviation from norm or cluster of unusual events
- ✓ Community information – provider networks, public media outlets, directly to the public
- ✓ Policy development and management – enforcement of protection of water supply, proper disposal of waste and sewage, reporting of communicable diseases
- ✓ Linking people to care – community health workers, school health nurses, community health center, immunization program
- ✓ Assuring a competent workforce – stay abreast of new developments and changes in drug therapies, antibiotic resistance, etc

Public Health Preparedness

- Identify the type of events that might occur in the community (hazard analysis).
- Plan emergency activities in advance to ensure a coordinated response to the consequences of a credible event (emergency response planning).
- Identify community resources applicable to the physical, social and psychological effects of disaster.
- Participate with other professionals who engage in emergency preparedness and response.
- Assess medical, public health, and mental health needs and assure provision of services.
- Assess viability of health care infrastructure.
- Identify groups most at risk from disaster (i.e., children, older adults, homeless, chronically ill, homebound, physically or mentally disabled).
- Provide disaster education both in advance of (i.e., what to expect in a disaster) and after events (i.e., how to deal with effects).
- Cooperate and collaborate with colleagues in the health sector to ensure that primary health, public health, mental health, and social impacts are adequately addresses in disaster planning.
- Use such resources as assessment, epidemiology, and data analysis to make and implement recommendations for limiting morbidity and mortality following disaster.

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Public Health Response to an Event

- Contacts identified and interviewed, provide testing for exposure, provide testing for environmental specimens, provide information to those exposed, help with risk assessment, and refer people for prevention measures if needed.
- Samples taken – environmental, potentially exposed individuals, treatment, community information and education.
- Provide on-scene health risk communication response.
- Prevent disease by providing health advice on injury prevention, food and water safety, and vector control.
- Assure that health services continue post impact, including acute, continuity of care, primary care and emergency care.
- Communicate with government officials about the public health effects of potential disasters and provide expert assistance during and after disasters.
- Assure potable water supply, food safety and sanitation.
- Educate about vector control and implement appropriate measures.
- Work with American Red Cross to provide emergency shelter.
- Identify victims and manage corpses.
- Be able to respond 24/7/365.

For additional information, please contact:

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