

FACT SHEET: PILOT PROJECT LISTENING TO LOCAL HEALTH DEPARTMENTS: HOW PAST EMERGENCIES CAN INFORM FUTURE PREPAREDNESS EFFORTS

SPECIFIC AIMS

As part of their central mission, Local Health Departments (LHDs) regularly attend to a wide variety of disease and health threats, including those that require a routine, urgent, or emergency responses. The proposed research aims to leverage the experiences of LHDs around the nation in an effort to begin describing the frequency of non-routine public health responses in recent history, the characteristics of the precipitating events, and the activities performed by LHDs during the response. Additionally, this research seeks to *classify* these non-routine events based on common response characteristics, including: (1) the activities performed and the functions filled by the LHD, (2) the role of the LHD in the overall response (i.e. central vs. supporting role), and (3) the composition of other responding agencies and organizations.

Given a wide range of public health threats, it is expected that LHDs will pursue different activities and assume different roles in order to prevent or contain disease, and that these roles will be influenced by both event characteristics and organizational capacity. This project's primary hypothesis is that certain disease threats elicit LHD responses that are more similar than others, and that these threats can be classified into homogeneous groups based on the functions performed by the LHD and the relative role of the LHD within the overall response. This type of classification system could provide significant improvements for public health planning. Like the traditional all-hazards approach, this research seeks to identify targets for public health preparedness that will provide benefits across multiple threats. Additionally, the proposed typology will demonstrate how public health response activities vary across different threats, allowing LHDs to develop more nuanced plans and training programs based on their expected roles and responsibilities within each threat category.

Aim 1. To conduct a systematic review of existing literature and databases describing recent LHD responses to emergencies and other urgent events.

- 1.1 A systematic review tool will be developed to abstract characteristics of urgent events. This tool will include the following components: event scenario and scale, LHD role (central vs. supporting role), and activities performed/functions filled by LHD.
- 1.2 Conduct a systematic review of events involving LHDs in the past 3 years, using peer-reviewed literature and key databases (e.g. Monterey Institute WMD database, US Department of Homeland Security Lessons Learned and Information Sharing).

Aim 2. To conduct a descriptive study of LHD involvement in urgent and emergency events in the past three years.

- 2.1 Develop a survey tool to elicit the characteristics of emergencies and urgent events requiring a public health response in the past three years, including: event scenario and scale, LHD role, LHD functions. This tool will be developed with input from practice and academic experts and will undergo field-testing and revisions prior to implementation.
- 2.2 Using a nationally representative sample of LHDs from each of the 10 HHS geographic regions, this survey tool will be used to gather data on LHD involvement in recent emergencies and other urgent events.
- 2.3 A subset of participating will be selected to participate in interviews to more fully describe their urgent or emergency event response efforts. Of particular interest will be LHDs with events or responses that are very common to and/or very dissimilar from other LHDs.

Aim 3. To develop a typology of public health emergency or urgent events.

- 3.1 Data from the surveys and interviews will be used to classify or group emergencies and urgent events based on the following features: (1) the activities performed and the functions filled by the LHD, (2) the role of the LHD in the overall response (i.e. central vs. supporting role), and (3) the composition of other responding agencies and organizations. Additional features will be considered, in consultation with practice and academic experts.

INVESTIGATOR

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