



Jefferson County Department of Health and Environment (JCDHE)

# Public Health Preparedness Program

## Local Public Health's Role in Emergency Response and Recovery . . . *Detecting, Containing, Controlling and Preventing Spread of Disease*

Public Health agencies (federal, state and local) have a legal responsibility to protect and preserve the public's health. JCDHE and local public health departments across the country have a long history of experience in detecting and responding to infectious disease outbreaks in communities.

Public health immunization efforts



regularly protect the public and prevent the spread of many life threatening diseases.

In the past few years, we

### **Preventing Spread of Disease:**

- Acquiring and dispensing medicines and vaccines through mass clinics
- Coordinating regional public health and medical efforts (Jefferson, Clear Creek, Gilpin Counties)
- Voluntary or mandated isolation or quarantine

have worked hard to understand and meet the public health challenges presented by the

potential of a large-scale biological, chemical or nuclear event.

Public health has the responsibility of being able to detect and respond to an act of bioterrorism quickly and efficiently in order to contain it, prevent the spread of disease and ultimately, save as many lives as possible. This may require either voluntary or mandated "shelter in place," or "isolation" to prevent others from getting ill. It may also require "quarantine," which separates



*Citizen receives flu shot during public health emergency preparedness exercise.*

or restricts persons who, may not yet be ill, but have been exposed to an infectious agent and thus may become infectious. Isolation and quarantine are public health strategies intended to stop the spread of infectious disease.

In a County public health emergency, JCDHE will receive medications and vaccines from the Colorado Department of Health and Environment (CDPHE) and the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and dispense them to the public through mass prophylaxis clinics. The Local Health Officer, (Dr. Mark Johnson, MPH, M.D. Executive Director, JCDHE) will be responsible for all medical and health coordination efforts.

With a limited number of local public health staff, (currently, 150) and a population of approximately 530,000 in Jefferson County, this will require immediate and clear collaboration and communication with state and regional networks of public health professionals, emergency response organizations, as well as, local volunteers and community partners.

### **Public Health Capacities for Handling Emergencies**

- **Surveillance and epidemiologic investigation:** monitoring community health status to detect the presence of bioterrorism agents and to characterize the public health threat or emergency;
- **Laboratory capacity:** identify, rule out, confirm and characterize biological threat agents
- **Risk communication:** coordinated and consistent communication and information on how to prevent disease and other related information for the response community, decision-makers and the general public during a public health emergency.
- **Public health planning and preparedness:** advance planning, coordination of emergency response and implementation of emergency measures to control and contain an outbreak. This involves the integration of public health expertise and activities with that of other emergency response agencies.

A public health "emergency" may include a heightened response to prevent and control a communicable disease. For example, the potential for a flu pandemic has recently caused worldwide

attention and a warning by the World Health Organizations for communities to prepare. On a smaller scale,

when a disease outbreak occurs, such as the Pertussis (whooping cough) outbreak in Jefferson County schools during the winter of 2004, JCDHE plays a leadership role in communicating with the public, health care providers and others to prevent further outbreaks and contain the spread of disease. Public Health acts as a liaison to provide information on the disease, prevention and control measures, updates on occurrence etc. If an outbreak is the result of a food borne illness, the Health Department's environmental health practitioners are involved in investigation and control because of their expertise in food sanitation and their role in the inspection and licensing of food

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service establishments.

The Department has worked closely with a number of agencies to develop plans that seek to organize how the County, and it's neighboring counties, Clear Creek and Gilpin, may best respond to any large scale public health threat

(e.g., flu, smallpox, anthrax, food-borne pathogens, emerging diseases).

These written plans detail how our health department will work with other agencies in response to any public health disaster that may occur in our community. But written plans are just that, written plans.

Effective implementation will require collaboration, coordination and practice with public health agencies, health care providers and traditional first responder entities, such as fire, police and emergency services.

JCDHE is committed to continuing to improve our capabilities and working with others to reach the highest safety and security levels for the citizens of Jefferson County.

#### Book Reader's Corner

#### "The Public Health Consequences of Disasters" Edited by Eric K. Noji

This book summarizes recent information about the public health impact of natural disasters, illustrated by examples from recent research in the field.

#### 2005 Goals

- Fit-Test Program, fit-test the department
- Nurse Volunteer letter, mailing, and training
- Write Flu Epidemic Plan
- Tabletop exercise with local partners
- Leadership training
- Training Plan (3-5year scope)
- Identify and establish more Points of Distribution (PODs)
- Identify and acquire equipment for Regional Transfer Points (RTPs) and PODs

## Building Competency and Infrastructure

JCDHEs Bioterrorism Program began in 2003 with one program coordinator and one epidemiologist. A part time support staff member was added in 2004. Following a legislative mandate, JCDHE has developed plans for handling large scale public health emergencies. The Health Alert Network was also set up to improve communication among public health agencies and emergency medical and health - care facilities.

#### Completed Emergency Plans:

- Regional Public Health Plans (Jefferson, Gilpin and Clear Creek Counties)
- SNS (Strategic National Stockpile Plan)
- Smallpox Plan
- Mass Prophylaxis Plan
- Risk Communications Plan

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## JCDHE Public Health Preparedness Program

<http://health.jeffco.us>

#### Regional Public Health Preparedness Planner

Lyle Moore, Jr., MPH, REHS  
1801 19<sup>th</sup> St. | Golden, CO 80401  
303.271.5731 | 720.490.6514 (cell)  
e-mail: [lmoore@jeffco.us](mailto:lmoore@jeffco.us)

#### Bioterrorism Admin. Support

Kari Arvisais, MS  
1801 19<sup>th</sup> St | Golden, CO 80401  
303.271.5772 | 720.219.5973 (cell)  
e-mail: [karvisai@jeffco.us](mailto:karvisai@jeffco.us)

#### Bioterrorism Regional Epidemiologist

Susan Moyer, RN, MSN  
1801 19<sup>th</sup> St. | Golden, CO 80401  
303.271.5742 | 303.358.6876 (cell)  
e-mail: [skmoyer@jeffco.us](mailto:skmoyer@jeffco.us)