

13-08

STATEMENT OF POLICY

Improving the National Notifiable Disease Surveillance System

Policy

The National Association of County and City Health Officials urges the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to support state and local involvement to improve the operations and utility of the National Notifiable Disease Surveillance System by providing increased funding to state, local, and territorial jurisdictions to support surveillance; convening a panel of state, local, territorial, and federal surveillance experts to develop a strategic vision for nationally notifiable disease surveillance; and ensuring that the National Notifiable Disease Surveillance System is supported by the most current technologies.

This expert panel should work to continuously improve the operations and utility of the National Notifiable Disease Surveillance System. Increased resources should support a review of the capacities and operations of the National Notifiable Disease Surveillance System and action steps needed to assure that the system is useful, actionable, and important to state and local health departments. Such a review and support for action should do the following:

- Describe the rationale for the information recommended to be collected;
- Describe the current state, local, and territorial surveillance processes and their rationale;
- Describe the characteristics of electronic systems that support efficient and actionable case-based surveillance that are used at state, local, and territorial health departments;
- Describe state and local best practices when implementing electronic data transmission;
- Identify the major challenges that interfere with efficient and actionable case-based surveillance and future challenges that may arise from anticipated technologic advances;
- Identify mechanisms enabling CDC and state, local, and territorial health departments to rapidly develop and exchange ad hoc data requests due to emergent situations;
- Identify recommended solutions to address these challenges;
- Implement the recommended solutions; and
- Ensure sustained funding for the most current technologies.

Justification

More transparent handling of state/local surveillance data within CDC and better data feedback loops are needed if state/local/territorial public health reporters are to work effectively with CDC staff to improve data quality.¹ This is particularly important with the complex National Notifiable Disease Surveillance System. The National Notifiable Disease Surveillance System usually begins with healthcare providers and clinical laboratories reporting state- and locally-mandated conditions to state, local, and territorial health departments. Health departments need



to collect information from all relevant sources, process the information, use it to track health conditions, implement control measures, notify partners, respond to outbreaks, generate reports, and report to the CDC those conditions that are designated as “notifiable” by the Council of State and Territorial Epidemiologists.

Without more input from jurisdictions, the CDC is not well positioned to appreciate local surveillance work flow and system needs, which increases the challenges of coordinating and maintaining such a complex system.¹ Current influences affecting public health are increasing the complexity and challenges of surveillance. These influences include changing populations (multicultural/multilingual society), technologic advances in information exchange, the need for more rapid information by greater numbers of stakeholders, healthcare reform, which is making electronic information more available from clinical settings and other non-health care sources (e.g. Google flu trends, first responder electronic data), and tighter constraints on public funding. Consideration of surveillance workflow processes at the state and local levels is important for successful enterprise-system design (electronic system or systems).

Additionally, there is currently no mechanism to enable the CDC and state and local health departments to rapidly institute national, standards-based data collection systems in response to national outbreaks. Rapidly developed ad hoc systems have proven cumbersome and have persisted long after outbreaks are over. There are currently no national standards for electronically sharing or transferring cases to another jurisdiction, including local to state surveillance system electronic transfer of information.¹ The CDC’s communications with state and local health departments regarding CDC’s surveillance system planning are frequently incomplete or untimely. Improved CDC communications and a long-term commitment to stated plans would greatly aid state, local, and territorial planning.

All of these factors demand a larger, more technically trained, and proficient workforce at all levels of governmental public health. Thus, increased federal support for disease surveillance and improving the systems used for it, such as the National Notifiable Disease Surveillance System, are essential. Continual input from state, local, and territorial stakeholders on the features and functions of the reporting system is essential to its utility.

Record of Action

Proposed by NACCHO Epidemiology Workgroup

Approved by NACCHO Board of Directors

July 2013

References

1. Council of State and Territorial Epidemiologists. (April 2013). *Review of and Recommendations for the National Notifiable Disease Surveillance System: A State and Local Health Department Perspective*. Retrieved on May 20, 2013, from http://c.ymcdn.com/sites/www.cste.org/resource/resmgr/PDFs/NNDS_Report.pdf.