



Philadelphia Department of Public Health
Division of Disease Control

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Health Advisory

July 4th “Welcome America” Special Events Emergency Preparedness Recommendations

June 28, 2007

From Thursday June 28 through July 4, 2007, the City of Philadelphia will host a number of large, high profile outdoor special events associated with the “Welcome America” festivities. While the City has received no information regarding any threat of terrorist activity specific to these events, it is critical that government agencies and healthcare facilities be prepared for both naturally occurring events that might result in increased illness, as well as the possibility of terrorism resulting in civilian casualties. The Philadelphia Department of Public Health Division of Disease Control (DDC) recommends that healthcare facilities review their emergency response and disaster preparedness plans before this event, and before the upcoming holiday period with the possibly heightened potential for terrorism. Specific recommendations include:

- Evaluate facilities and personnel to ensure the safety and security of both
- Ensure that appropriate staff understand their roles in an emergency and communications protocols
- Update clinical providers on biological, chemical, and radiological agents. (Information on these threats may be found at www.bt.cdc.gov, and www.atsdr.cdc.gov, and www.health.state.pa.us)
- Review procedures that address medical treatment of mass casualties, including decontamination protocols, the use of personal protective equipment and triage protocols
- Prepare to treat individuals suffering from heat related illnesses

The Philadelphia Department of Public Health Division of Disease Control (DDC) reviews data daily from multiple sources to facilitate the recognition of disease outbreaks. These include reports of notifiable diseases, triage data from hospital Emergency Departments, calls placed to the City’s 911 Call Center, regional over-the-counter pharmaceutical sales, and deaths reported to the Philadelphia Medical Examiner’s Office. However, DDC always relies on clinicians to report **by telephone** conditions that require immediate notification, as well as any outbreak or unusual presentation or cluster of disease. Indicators of naturally-occurring outbreaks or possible biological terrorism are:

- An unusual temporal or geographic clustering of illness (e.g., persons who attended the same public event or gathering)
- Increase in serious lower respiratory illness with negative tests for common bacteria and viruses
- Patients presenting with clinical signs and symptoms that suggest an infectious disease outbreak (e.g., ≥ 2 persons presenting with an unexplained febrile illness associated with sepsis, pneumonia, respiratory failure, or rash or a botulism-like syndrome with flaccid muscle paralysis, especially if occurring in otherwise healthy persons)
- An unusual age distribution for common diseases (e.g., an increase in chickenpox-like illness in adult patients)
- Single cases of disease due to uncommon, non-indigenous agents (e.g., anthrax, plague, tularemia) in patients with no history suggesting an explanation for illness
- Large number of cases of acute flaccid paralysis with prominent bulbar palsies, suggestive of a release of *botulinum* toxin

Clinicians are encouraged to obtain clinical specimens for diagnostic testing. DDC can assist in processing specimens free of charge in outbreak situations, or when the services of the PA Bureau of Laboratories are necessary. Please contact the Division of Disease Control at 215-685-6741 to report conditions requiring immediate notification. After hours, contact the City Hall Operator at 215-686-1776 and ask to speak to the person on-call for the Division.