

Public Health Emergency Preparedness, 2012

Public health emergency preparedness encompasses the critical infrastructure and key resources necessary to prepare for, respond to and recover from emergencies that have the potential to affect the health of populations. It includes the establishment and maintenance of 15 public health emergency preparedness capabilities ranging from fatality management, mass care, emergency public information and warning and medical material management to laboratory and public health surveillance and epidemiological investigations. It also includes empowering and engaging citizens in their own personal preparedness and recovery strategies and those of their communities.¹

Threats that can lead to public health emergencies are always present. They include natural disasters as well as chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear and explosions. The impact of these threats can range from local outbreaks to incidents with statewide, national or global ramifications. Because public health emergencies can be unpredictable and vary from year to year, data gathered in this area often focuses on the capacity to respond. However, for the State Health Assessment, indicators were chosen that reflect the need for this capacity.

In 2011:

- The Maine Emergency Management Agency recorded 13 public health-related events. Previous years' data in 2009 and 2008 included five and 10 events, respectively.
- There were 23 health alerts and advisories issued by the Maine CDC. This was down from 78 in 2009, when the H1N1 flu pandemic occurred, and 36 in 2010.
- The Health and Environmental Testing Laboratory had 10 submissions that met qualification to be submitted to the US Laboratory Response Network. Previous years' submissions ranged from 7 in 2008 and 2010 to 17 in 2004.²



Different types of public health hazards require different response levels based on their potential to affect the health and safety of the public. Snow and ice storms are more common in Maine, but hold a lower level of risk than a category 5 hurricane, or major earthquake. By looking at both the probability of an event happening, and the likelihood of an event causing significant death, illness or injury, public health emergency preparedness partners can better focus on the most important types of events for which to prepare. In Maine, the top types of emergencies with the highest Risk and Vulnerability scores are:²

- Cyber Attack (83%)
- Medical Supply Disruption/Shortage (78%)
- Tornado (78%)
- Major Communications Disruption (72%)
- Mass Casualty Incident (67%)
- Hazmat Incident (56%)
- Information Systems Failure (56%)

As with other health issues, public health emergencies can disproportionately affect different populations. However, there is no current Maine data showing these disparities. Regardless of these, preparedness activities include looking at

vulnerable populations, including, but not limited to people with cultural and language barriers, disabilities, age and geographical differences, and other characteristics that might indicate special needs.

Healthy Maine 2020 also has objectives related to public health emergency preparedness, including:¹

- Reduce the time necessary to activate designated personnel in response to a public health emergency via the Health Alert Network
- Increase the frequency and number of outreach activities to the community through training and education about public health emergency preparedness
- Increase the number of trained public health and health care emergency responders
- Reduce the unnecessary surge in hospital emergency departments during an event with public health significance

¹ Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention. Healthy Maine 2020. Available from: <http://www.maine.gov/dhhs/mecdc/healthy-maine/index.shtml> (accessed 9/20/13).

² Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention. State Health Assessment – 2012. Available from: <http://www.maine.gov/dhhs/mecdc/phdata/sha/sha-details.shtml?emergency> (accessed 9/20/13).