

CDC Report: Oregon improves in health emergency preparedness

by Bend_Weekly_News_Sources

Oregon's ability to respond to a public health emergency has dramatically improved since 2001, when federal funds for that purpose began to flow to states across the nation, according to a national report released Wednesday. The report, compiled by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, shows Oregon has made progress in the areas of disease detection and investigation, laboratory testing capabilities and planning, training, and exercising. The CDC does not rank states, instead presenting the data as a snapshot in time, recognizing that improvements may have occurred since the information was collected. "The report confirms that preparedness funding has made a significant difference in state and local planning efforts," said Michael Skeels, Ph.D., interim state public health director in the Oregon Department of Human Services. "We are much better positioned to mount an effective response to a public health emergency than we were seven years ago." Skeels pointed to several areas of improvement: • Disease detection and investigation have round-the-clock capability to receive and investigate urgent disease reports and the ability to rapidly share information between state and local health personnel and across state lines. • The Oregon State Public Health Laboratory, part of the national Laboratory Response Network, electronically links to more than 60 medical labs in Oregon to share information and speed detection of unusual disease occurrences. Oregon's state lab recently acquired Biosafety Level 3 capability, necessary for handling hazardous microbes and toxins that might need rapid analysis during a threat or emergency. • The state's 2006 participation in a two-day, full-scale pandemic influenza exercise revealed some key successes and areas where improvements were needed. The Lessons learned were implemented during the 2007 five-day national TopOff 4 exercise, which revealed additional areas for further development. "Preparedness is a continuous process and we need to keep moving forward," said Skeels. "It's important to keep training and exercising to improve performance. Laboratory instruments and other emergency equipment must be maintained to ensure they work well in an emergency. Our response plans must be continually updated to address emerging health threats." A recent CDC review showed Oregon still needs to improve in several areas in preparation for deploying the Strategic National Stockpile, a system by which Oregon can rapidly bring in medications to respond to an emergency. Skeels noted that addressing these areas is a current priority for the Public Health Emergency Preparedness program.

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