

Dear Public Health Colleague,

The Core Emergency Preparedness Competencies for All Public Health Workers described in this brochure are based upon the essential services of public health and provide a foundation for personal and agency development. A competent workforce is one component of a strong public health infrastructure.

These competencies are a basis for improving preparedness for all public health emergencies, including a bioterrorism event. The Public Health Practice Program Office is pleased to support projects which achieve our vision of “every health department fully prepared; every community better protected.”



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## HOW TO USE THESE COMPETENCIES

This brochure outlines core competencies in emergency preparedness for public health workers. Some of these competencies are applicable to every worker; others are specific to workers in administrative, professional, technical or support positions.

Training for, and measurement of, these core competencies requires tailoring them to the structure and function of each individual public health agency. The size of the jurisdiction and agency will dictate how general or specific an individual's job may be.

Overall, these competencies can be used:

- To update or revise job descriptions
- As an outline for new employee orientation and training
- To guide self-assessments by public health employees

Depending upon the type of emergency, the public health agency may be in a lead position, in a collaborative role, or in a secondary/supportive role. In order for the public health agency to fulfill its role, the agency staff must be competent to carry out their responsibilities.

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# Emergency Preparedness



Photo: FEMA

## CORE COMPETENCIES FOR ALL PUBLIC HEALTH WORKERS



## EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS COMPETENCIES FOR ALL PUBLIC HEALTH WORKERS

In order for the Public Health System to meet performance standards in emergency preparedness ALL Public Health Workers must be competent to:

- **DESCRIBE** the public health role in emergency response in a range of emergencies that might arise. (For example: “This department provides surveillance, investigation and public information in disease outbreaks, and collaborates with other agencies in biological, environmental and weather emergencies.”)
- **DESCRIBE** the agency chain of command in emergency response.
- **IDENTIFY** and **LOCATE** the agency emergency response plan (or in large agencies, the pertinent portion of the plan).
- **DESCRIBE** his/her functional role(s) and responsibilities in emergency response and **DEMONSTRATE** his/her role(s) in regular drills.
- **DEMONSTRATE** correct use of all communication equipment used for emergency communication.
- **DESCRIBE** his/her communication role(s) in emergency response:
  - Within the agency
  - With the media
  - With the general public
  - Personal (with family, neighbors)
- **IDENTIFY** limits to his/her own knowledge, skills and authority and **IDENTIFY** key system resources for referring matters that exceed these limits.
- **APPLY** creative problem solving and flexible thinking to unusual challenges within his/her functional responsibilities and **EVALUATE** effectiveness of all actions taken.
- **RECOGNIZE** deviations from the norm that might indicate an emergency and **DESCRIBE** appropriate action (e.g. communicate clearly within the chain of command).

Public Health Leaders/Administrators must also be competent to:

- **DESCRIBE** the chain of command and management system (“incident command system” or similar protocol) for emergency response in the jurisdiction.
- **COMMUNICATE** the public health information, roles, capacities, and legal authority to all emergency response partners -- such as other public health agencies, other health agencies, other government agencies -- during planning, drills and actual emergencies. (This includes contributing to effective community-wide response through leadership, team building, negotiation and conflict resolution.)
- **MAINTAIN** regular communication with emergency response partners. (This includes maintaining a current directory of partners and identifying appropriate methods for contacting them in emergencies.)
- **ASSURE** that the agency (or agency unit) has a written, regularly updated plan for major categories of emergencies that respects the culture of the community.
- **ASSURE** that the agency (or agency unit) regularly practices all parts of emergency response.
- **EVALUATE** every emergency response drill (or actual response) to identify needed internal and external improvements.
- **ASSURE** that knowledge and skill gaps identified through emergency response planning, drills, and evaluation are addressed.

Note: Combine leader/administrator competencies with professional competencies when public health leaders and administrators also have medical, nursing, or other professional duties.

Leader/Administrative occupations involve the exercise of analytical ability, judgment, discretion, personal responsibility, and the application of a substantial body of knowledge of principles, concepts, and practices applicable to one or more fields of administration or management. NB: Public health leaders/administrators may also be public health professionals (adapted from the US Office of Personnel Management).

Public Health Professionals must also be competent to:

- **DEMONSTRATE** readiness to apply professional skills to a range of emergency situations during regular drills. (For example: access, use and interpret surveillance data; access and use lab resources; access and use science-based investigation and risk assessment protocols; identify and use appropriate personal protective equipment.)
- **MAINTAIN** regular communication with partner professionals in other agencies involved in emergency response. (This includes contributing to effective community-wide response through leadership, team building, negotiation and conflict resolution.)
- **PARTICIPATE** in continuing education to maintain up to date knowledge in areas relevant to emergency response. (For example: emerging infectious diseases, hazardous materials, and diagnostic tests.)

Note: Combine these competencies with the leader/administrator competencies when public health professionals also have management duties.

Professional occupations require knowledge acquired through education or training equivalent to a bachelor’s degree or higher; require the exercise of discretion, judgment, and personal responsibility for the application of an organized body of knowledge that is constantly studied (adapted from the US Office of Personnel Management).

Public Health Technical and Support Staff must also be competent to:

- **DEMONSTRATE** the use of equipment (including personal protective equipment) and skills associated with his/her functional role in emergency response during regular drills.
- **DESCRIBE** at least one resource for backup support in key areas of responsibility.

Technical occupations involve non-routine work and are typically supportive of a professional or administrative field; involve extensive practical knowledge gained through job training less than that represented by college graduation; involve elements of the work of the professional or administrative field, but less than full competence.

Clerical/Support occupations involve structured work in support of office, business, or fiscal operations; duties are performed according to established policies or techniques and require training, experience, or working knowledge related to the tasks (adapted from the US Office of Personnel Management).