



## **National Center for Disaster Preparedness**

Mailman School of Public Health  
Columbia University

### *Mission*

Centers for Public Health Preparedness (CPHP) train front-line workers in state and local health departments, preparing them to protect American citizens in the event of a public health emergency – inclusive of infectious, environmental, occupational, and terrorist threats. Created in 2000 with CDC funding, the network of 27 centers located in graduate, accredited schools of public health has already reached hundreds of thousands of public health workers through applied training and targeted technical expertise aimed at protecting communities in real-world crises. The CPHP network of world-renowned preparedness experts, convened and coordinated by the Association of Schools of Public Health (ASPH), ensures a strong public health response is available across the nation when and where it is needed.

### *Importance*

The Columbia University National Center for Disaster Preparedness (NCDP) at the Mailman School of Public Health is a partnership between the Mailman School of Public Health and the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (NYCDOHMH). The NCDP also collaborates with the: New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH), Orange County Department of Health (OCDOH), Putnam County Department of Health (PCDOH), the Rockland County Department of Health (RCDOH), the State University of New York at Albany School of Public Health CPHP (the Albany CPHP) and other agencies, including a hospital, EMS, and community based clinics.

In all of these relationships, *the NCDP fulfills a unique gap in providing competency-based emergency preparedness workforce development for the public health workforce* (leaders/administrators, professional and technical & clerical personnel) as well as for other groups that work

with public health to achieve public health emergency preparedness and response. In fact, the relationships between the NCDP and its public practice partners have evolved to point where the NCDP has become the “go-to” provider of many of the preparedness and emergency response training required by city, local, and state partners. Additionally, the NCDP serves as the main source of evidence-based information our partners use for the preparedness and response activities including: preparedness and response plans, risk communication initiatives, and policy documentation.

### *Accomplishments*

- *Trained* over 1,500 participants in Incident Command across the New York area, 800 NYCDOHMH nurses in emergency preparedness and Point of Distribution (POD) operations, and over 500 participants in the National Incident Management System.
- *Responded* to the NYCDOHMH's request for assistance in reviewing city hospital evacuation protocols and developing training and education programs aimed at increasing the city's ability to coordinate the evacuation of all the city's hospitals.
- *Fulfilled* the NYCDOHMH request for assistance in the wake of the October 2001 anthrax attacks by developing case investigation surge capacity for events that rapidly exhaust local epidemiological resources via a new Student Epi-Surge Volunteer Program (SESVP). The SESVP is a partnership between the NCDP and the NYCDOHMH whereby second-year students from the Mailman School of Public Health are trained in case investigation and made available to respond when needed by the department. To date, the SESVP has a surge case investigator registry of 150 responders.
- *Developed* a guide for public health departments, in collaboration with the School of Nursing's Center for Health Policy, which outlines the approach our Center takes when creating, delivering, and evaluating drills and exercises. Since its inception, the NCDP has created and delivered two to three exercises or drills per year to assist public health practice partners in testing and evaluating their preparedness and response plans. Last year, the NCDP successfully evaluated the first pediatric POD exercise in New York State.

## Contact

Wilmer Alvarez, MA  
Tel: (212) 342-3908  
Email: [wa2112@columbia.edu](mailto:wa2112@columbia.edu)  
<http://www.ncdp.columbia.mailman.edu>

- Created a guide for public health departments seeking to outsource drills and exercises in collaboration with the School of Nursing's Center of Health Policy. The guide was developed in collaborative manner with experts in field, including representatives from local public health departments, and has been very well received.
- Partnered across the nation in support of public health. For example:
  - provided general post-Katrina and Rita assistance as requested in Louisiana and Mississippi; and,
  - helped launch "Operation Assist" which mobilized medical resources (paramedics, mental health professionals, and epidemiologists) for families who had evacuated New Orleans, in concert with the Children's Health Fund and the Mailman School of Public Health.
- Launched a web-based course aimed at local public health workers to educate them on the basic concepts of emergency preparedness. The web-based course was the first to include emergency preparedness competencies for public health workers. Since its launch, over 15,000 public health workers have accessed the Basic Emergency Preparedness for Public Health Workers Course (BEP), and the NCDP has issued over 6,000 certificates of completion. The BEP course has been referred to as the "industry standard" and has been incorporated into public health emergency preparedness training in over 10 states.
- Launched a series of webcourses aimed at EMS professionals, dentists, and members of the media. To date, these courses have been completed by over 1,500 professionals across the nation, and have facilitated development of NCDP's Learning Management System (LMS) in upcoming year. The LMS will consolidate current NCDP courses, along with some under development (e.g. Surge Capacity and Hospital Evacuations), into a centralized system that will provide users with a more comprehensive and self-directed learning experience.