

Northwest PUBLIC HEALTH

From the Dean

Bioterrorism: A Timely Reminder of the Importance of Public Health



The focus of our third issue of Northwest Public Health is timely and important. The range of articles and topics mirrors the scope of public health's preparations to handle bioterrorism as well as disease outbreaks and natural disasters. The events of the past year— the Nisqually earthquake, terrorist attacks in New York and Washington, DC, and their environmental aftereffects, the anthrax scares, the spread of West Nile Virus, and outbreaks of Ebola— all highlight the importance of public health in today's world.


Although there has been an increasing awareness of deficiencies in the public health system caused by decades of neglect and budget cuts, the threat of bioterrorism has brought a new urgency to efforts to rebuild the public health infrastructure. Significant levels of funding are being allocated by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to Centers of Public Health Preparedness, one of which is located here in the UW School of Public Health and Community Medicine. With special expertise in public health communications and information systems development, our Center serves as a resource to the entire Northwest. Heightened efforts are also under way to develop a more broadly prepared, increasingly diverse, and culturally competent work force; to increase public health lab capacity; and to improve and expand surveillance systems and mobilization capabilities.

In response to the threat of bioterrorism, the School and members of our faculty have linked with the state Department of Health, Public Health-Seattle & King County and other health departments, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to upgrade preparedness throughout the Northwest. In addition, our educational outreach activities have dramatically increased. We have held many interviews with and orientation sessions for the media. We have given and hosted presentations on bioterrorism for the University and external communities, briefed legislators and their staffs, and participated in a number of courses and forums for a range of audiences. In early April 2002, the School co-sponsored the BioDefense Mobilization Conference held here in Seattle, which drew speakers and participants from all around the country.

Despite the current focus on bioterrorism, it is worth remembering that the role of public health extends well beyond responding to those particular threats. Recent events have served as a dramatic reminder to policy makers and the general public of the critical value of a strong and responsive public health system, but our ability to deal with all emergencies—from earthquakes to food-borne epidemics to outbreaks of reemerging, antibiotic-resistant diseases and mysterious new viruses—will also be enhanced by increasing our preparedness, strengthening the public health infrastructure, and building our capacity to respond to bioterrorism.

Northwest Public Health provides one of the ways in which the UW School of Public Health and Community Medicine and our partners strive to support communication throughout the region on topics of import and concern to all communities in the Northwest. Bioterrorism certainly qualifies as one of those subjects, and I hope you find this issue of *Northwest Public Health* informative.

Patricia W. Wahl, Dean
UW School of Public Health

© 2023 University of Washington School of Public Health 
Produced by the Northwest Center for Public Health Practice
[Privacy](#) / [Terms](#)