Telling Your Story
Insights and Tips to Promote Syndromic Surveillance

2:15PM EST | November 18th, 2020 | 2020 SyS Symposium

Trainers:
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National Syndromic Surveillance Program
Community of Practice
Advancing the Science and Practice of Syndromic Surveillance

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Council of State and Territorial Epidemiologists

Introduction to Telling Your Story: Insights and Tips to Promote Syndromic Surveillance

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Center for Surveillance, Epidemiology, and Laboratory Services (CSELS)

November 18, 2020

The Importance of a Good Story

"Storytelling is the oldest form of education."

Terry Tempest Williams, Author

Key Ingredients to a Strong Story

- You…
- Informs the audience
- Communicates action through an outcome
- ***Good*** versus ***Great***

The Bottom Line

Writing the stories

Oona Powell
Associate Director, Communication Science
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Center for Surveillance, Epidemiology, and Laboratory Services (CSELS)

Specific reasons for developing and sharing success stories may include:

- Capturing progress over time *(You don't have to complete a project or initiative to share a story.*)
- Sharing achievements
- Educating decision-makers about the impact of your program
- Demonstrating responsible use of resources to stakeholders
- Sharing "best practices" with other similarly-funded programs
- Attracting new partners for collaboration

Story themes

Identifying Risks

Protecting Health

Educating

Innovating

Saving Resources

Creating Products

Informing Decisions

Content Credit: Holly R. Wilson, MHSE, MCHES | CDC/DDNID/NCEH/DEHSP

Story framework

- Situation/public health problem
- Actions taken
- Outcome
- Lessons learned

How long should the stories be?

- Short version
  - “bite size” or 1-2 sentences
- Medium version
  - “snack size” or a short paragraph
- Longer version
  - 500 words or less

How long should the stories be? *(continued)*

- Short version example
  - Syndromic data in Georgia allowed for a rapid response to protect the public's health after children were exposed to chlorine gas during a swim meet.

How long should the stories be? (*continued*)

- **Medium version example:**
  - Chlorine gas exposure is not the first thing that comes to mind when thinking of swimming pool safety. However, for parents of children at a swim meet in DeKalb County, Georgia, it became a frightening reality. Syndromic surveillance data alerted Georgia's Department of Public Health to a dangerous exposure to the gas after several children visited local emergency departments with symptoms of coughing and difficulty breathing. Health officials noticed that patients shared common symptoms and alerted the county board of health. Environmental health workers found violations at the pool, resulting in a temporary closure and an opportunity to educate the pool company on proper and safe pool management.

Full-length version of story

NSSP National Syndromic Surveillance Program
BioSense Platform

Syndromic Surveillance
Success Stories

Lessons Learned

- ***There's value in using routine state-level syndromic surveillance to identify local-level clusters and outbreaks that might not otherwise be detected.***
- ***Effective communication between state and local public health agencies can enable swift action to prevent further illness.*** Good teamwork between and within levels of the public health system contribute to the mission of helping the public achieve the best possible health.

Contacts

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Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
Center for Surveillance, Epidemiology, and Laboratory Services
Division of Health Informatics and Surveillance
www.cdc.gov/cdc.gov/nssp

The National Syndromic Surveillance Program (NSSP) BioSense Platform is a product of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The findings and outcomes described in this NSSP success story are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position of CDC.

This success story shows how NSSP
- Improves Data Representativeness
- Improves Data Quality, Timeliness, and Use
- ✓ Strengthens Syndromic Surveillance Practice
- ✓ Informs Public Health Action or Response

DeKalb County, Georgia, Uses Syndromic Data to Identify

Chlorine Gas Exposure at a Swimming Pool

On Saturday, May 19, 2018, during a routine visit at a community pool in DeKalb County, Georgia, technicians from a pool company observed that one of two pumps was not working properly and there was no chlorine in the water. They hand-fed granular chlorine into the pool through the skimmers and opened the pool. A swim meet began about an hour later. **Several children were exposed to chlorine gas.** Low-level exposure to chlorine gas can result in nose, throat, and eye irritation. At high levels of exposure, breathing chlorine gas can cause difficulty breathing or shortness of breath, coughing, and lung damage.

Actions Taken

On Monday, May 21, 2018, the Georgia Department of Public Health's syndromic surveillance coordinator noticed anomalies in DeKalb County data. Two days earlier, seven patients ages 10 to 12 who lived in adjacent DeKalb County ZIP codes were seen at two emergency departments within a 24-minute period. They complained of breathing problems, and their parents suspected chemical exposure. The coordinator notified the DeKalb County Board of Health.

The Board of Health's Environmental Health epidemiologist determined, via chart abstraction and parent interviews, that the patients had been exposed to an unknown gas during a local swim meet on the previous Saturday. The parents reported that the meet started around 10 a.m. and the children became symptomatic around 10:45 a.m. They called emergency medical services, which assessed and treated the children before transferring several to emergency departments, while others were taken by private car. Arrival times ranged from 12:50 PM to 1:14 PM. Seven children had predominant symptoms of coughing and difficulty breathing. Most (88%) were males. They were observed for 1 to 2 hours and discharged. The epidemiologist notified the Environmental Health county supervisor who, in turn, spoke with the pool company's vice president.

County code states that all pumps must be operational and that the disinfectant residual must always be maintained. Not meeting either criteria is considered an *imminent health hazard* requiring immediate closure of the pool. Here, the granular chlorine mixed with water in the skimmers to produce chlorine gas. During an inspection on Tuesday, May 22, 2018, the county supervisor identified this and other violations and immediately closed the pool.

Outcome

Syndromic surveillance helped identify and close a pool in violation of health codes—*protecting the public's health*. Syndromic data led to rapid identification of emergency department patients who shared common symptoms. State and local public health agencies (Georgia Department of Public Health and DeKalb County Board of Health) and various disciplines (epidemiology and environmental health) communicated effectively. Once local Environmental Health staff were alerted, they investigated and determined the cause of patients' illnesses and closed the pool to prevent additional exposures. Staff followed up by ensuring the pool owner and management company took corrective action before reopening the pool. Environmental Health staff educated the pool company on proper and safe pool management according to county code, benefitting swimmers at this pool and other pools throughout the summer and beyond.

National Syndromic Surveillance Program (NSSP)

- NSSP Home
- What is Syndromic Surveillance?
- Syndromic Surveillance In Action
- How NSSP Works Across CDC
- Technical Resource Center

Syndromic Surveillance in Action: NSSP Success Stories

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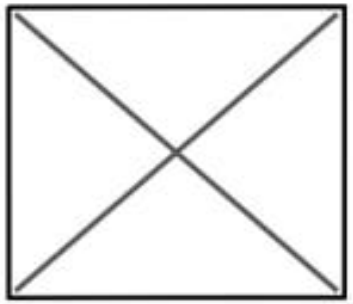
Search: Topic, category, etc.

Filter by: Category

Filter by:
- Alabama
- Alaska
- Arizona
- Arkansas
- California
- Florida
- Georgia
- Louisiana

Sort by: Newest-Oldest

Clear all

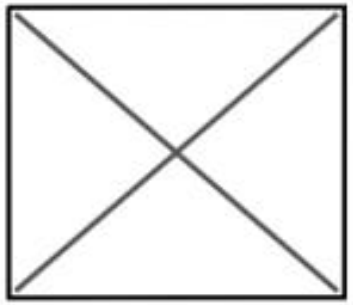


Louisiana Takes Action A… Sharing Syndromic Data

Louisiana puts syndromic su… o fight substance abuse through policies, innovative… ommunity programs.

Keword(s): Injury

Read more



Surveillance of Suicide Attempts and Ideation Presenting in Area Emergency Departments

A Northern Idaho public health district used syndromic data on suicidal thoughts and suicide attempts as clues to better interventions.

Keword(s): Injury

Read more

NSSP

COVID-19 Response

What is Syndromic Surveillance?

Syndromic Surveillance in Action

How NSSP Works Across CDC

NSSP Technical Resource Center

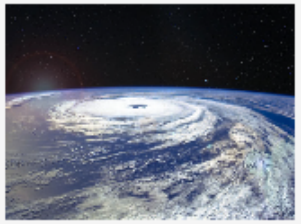
Syndromic Surveillance in Action: NSSP Success Stories

Search

Filter by Categories

Clear

Found 25 items.



North Carolina Integrates Data from Disaster Medical Assistance Teams for Improved Situational Awareness

North Carolina used real-time syndromic surveillance data to monitor injuries, illness, and deaths during and after Hurricane Florence. With help from NSSP, data from evacuation shelters were quickly added to make situational awareness more complete.

Categories: Disaster Response

Tennessee Uses Syndromic Surveillance to Identify Potential Cases of Mumps

The Tennessee Department of Health integrates near real-time syndromic surveillance with traditional surveillance methods. Early detection of reportable diseases and conditions of immediate public health interest improves the public health response.

Categories: Infectious Disease

Chemical Spill in Kansas: Importance of Sharing Information Across Sites

Kansas was using syndromic surveillance to monitor health effects when a distilling plant accidentally mixed sulfuric acid and sodium hypochlorite, releasing a plume of chlorine gas across a city of 11,000 residents.

Get Email Updates

To receive email updates about this page, enter your email address:

Email Address

What's this?

Submit

Related Links

BioSense Platform Access *requires login*

Knowledge Repository Access

Examples of re-purposing success story content

- Point papers for governing audiences (federal, state, local)
- Examples for budget justification
- Talking points for senior leadership
- One-pagers for visitors and new employees
- Web content - library of stories
- Training
- News media inquiries
- Recruiting new employees
- Tweets for social media promotion

Sample tweets developed from stories

Chlorine Gas	LinkedIn	Syndromic Surveillance in Action: Learn how syndromic data in Georgia allowed for a rapid response to protect the public's health after children were exposed to chlorine gas during a swim meet. Funding from the National Syndromic Surveillance Program supports the use of syndromic surveillance in improving the nation's public health. *(Link)*	
Rabies	LinkedIn	Syndromic Surveillance in Action: Learn how syndromic data on potential rabies exposure helped Kansas health officials take action to educate the public and health professionals about appropriate post-exposure care. Funding from the National Syndromic Surveillance Program supports the use of syndromic surveillance in improving the nation's public health. *(Link)*	

Sample tweets developed from stories (*continued*)

Suicide	LinkedIn	Syndromic Surveillance in Action: Learn how a Northern Idaho public health district used syndromic data on suicidal thoughts and suicide attempts to better understand who's at risk for suicide. Funding from the National Syndromic Surveillance Program supports the use of syndromic surveillance in improving the nation's public health. *(Link)*	
Substance Abuse	LinkedIn	Syndromic Surveillance in Action: Learn how Louisiana put syndromic surveillance data to work to fight substance abuse through policies, innovative ideas for response, and community programs. Funding from the National Syndromic Surveillance Program supports the use of syndromic surveillance in improving the nation's public health. *(Link)*	

Sample tweets developed from stories (*continued)*

Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever	LinkedIn	Syndromic Surveillance in Action: Learn how syndromic surveillance data on potential cases of Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever help Arizona health officials ensure continuity of care for this potentially life-threatening tick-borne illness. Funding from the National Syndromic Surveillance Program supports the use of syndromic surveillance in improving the nation's public health. (Link)	
Injuries to Agricultural Workers	LinkedIn	Syndromic Surveillance in Action: Learn how the Kansas Department of Health and Environment captures data on emergency department visits related to agricultural injuries to better understand how these injuries affect Kansans. Funding from the National Syndromic Surveillance Program supports the use of syndromic surveillance in improving the nation's public health. (Link)	

Sample tweets developed from stories (*continued)*

Mass Gatherings	LinkedIn	Syndromic Surveillance in Action: When more than 30,000 people attended an event in Southeastern West Virginia, syndromic surveillance provided near real-time, accurate data on injuries and illnesses, providing public health officials with situational awareness to measure the burden on the healthcare system. Funding from the National Syndromic Surveillance Program supports the use of syndromic surveillance in improving the nation's public health. *(Link)*	
Visits of Interest	LinkedIn	Syndromic Surveillance in Action: A spike in visits to emergency departments in adjoining New Jersey counties resulted from a fire at a university dormitory. This event allowed New Jersey health officials and CDC to use syndromic surveillance to collaborate and compare data to confirm incidents of public health concern. Funding from the National Syndromic Surveillance Program supports the use of syndromic surveillance in improving the nation's public health. *(Link)*	

Informing the Legislative Process

42 U.S. Code § 247-d (b) (1)

- …shall provide for the establishment of an **integrated system**…of public health alert communications and surveillance networks
- **Federal, State, and local** public health officials
- **Public and private** health-related laboratories, hospitals, poison control centers, and other health care facilities

42 U.S. Code § 247-d (c) (1)

- …a **near real-time** electronic nationwide public health **situational awareness** capability…
- …**interoperable network** of systems to **share data** and information…
- …enhance **early detection** of, rapid response to, and **management** of…
- Such network shall be **built on existing** State situational awareness systems….

VIRGINIA

- Pilot project between **VDH and DoD** health officials
- **Early notification** of ILI in DoD educational facility
- Both VDH and DoD **monitored in real-time**
- *Early detection*; *data sharing; state/federal coordination*

EVALI

- Highlighted
  - Pinpointed ED visits uptick
  - state HD use to identify, track and monitor impact on individual health
  - data sharing with CDC/FDA
- *Disease monitoring ; federal/state data sharing*

NORTH CAROLINA

- Hurricane Florence
- **Monitored** storm-related health effects (CO poisoning, medication refills, injuries, etc.)
- **Shelter monitoring ICW DMAT**
- *Disease monitoring ; federal/state data sharing*

FLORIDA

- Used **state-based** system to **detect** Zika
- **Monitored** health effects of Hurricanes Hermine & Matthew
- *Early detection*; *data sharing*

LOUISIANA

- Opioid insights based on **ED data**
- **Shared** with state-wide coalitions & organizations
- **Understand trends**, develop policy, innovative approaches
- *Public/Private entities, event management*; *data sharing*

MARYLAND

- ***Public Health Preparedness & Situational Awareness Report***
- **State-based** system
- Weekly report provides **snapshot of disease activity**
- *Early detection*; *data sharing*

How we can help

- Provide template for stories
- Collaborate to develop story ideas
- Provide writing/editing support
- Provide appropriate images for stories for posting on web site
- Develop social media messages with images and widely distribute

- For assistance, contact Sue Swensen, CDC, Division of Health Informatics and Surveillance (DHIS)
- To view current success stories on DHIS Website: https://www.cdc.gov/nssp/success-stories.html?Sort=Date%3A%3Adesc

Q & A

For more information, contact CDC
1-800-CDC-INFO (232-4636)
TTY: 1-888-232-6348 www.cdc.gov

The findings and conclusions in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

National Syndromic Surveillance Program

Community of Practice

Advancing the Science and Practice of Syndromic Surveillance

Block Schedule

	Training	Methods	Innovation
1-1:15PM EST	Daily Opening, Logistics, Overview		
1:15-2PM EST	Training: Call Up Your Data Using APIs	Breakout: Querying from Scratch - Cooking Up New Syndromes	Training: Data Sharing Step-by-Step Using the AMC
	...BREAK...		
2:15-3PM EST	Training: Telling Your Story - Insights and Tips to Promote Syndromic Surveillance	Breakout: The Art of Surveillance - Data Visualizations	Lightning: New Tactics for Old Problems
	...BREAK...		
3:15-4PM EST	Training: Dashboard Creation in NSSP ESSENCE	Breakout: Making the Best of a SyS Situation - Data Quality for SyS	Roundtable: COVID, Current Events, and More - Discussing Syndromic Surveillance Practices in 2020
	...BREAK...		
4:15-5PM EST	Virtual Happy Hour		

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