

Council of State and Territorial Epidemiologists Position Statement

02-EC-01

Committee: Executive

Title: Support for Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Water Public Health Action Plan

Statement of the Problem:

Water is an integral part of our lives -- we drink it, bathe in it, and play in it -- and necessary for our survival. As a result, all societies have a basic need for safe, healthy water. In the United States, the burden of waterborne illness has been markedly reduced by improvements in sanitation and water treatment. However, water is still not an illness-free vehicle. The public continues to be affected by waterborne outbreaks of illness from drinking and recreational water and by non-epidemic episodes of gastrointestinal illness, of which, ten to thirty percent of all episodes are being attributed to treated tap water. In addition, the provision of treated water raises the concern whether the treatment by-products themselves may also cause health effects.

Concerns also exist about pollution of our drinking and recreational water by microbial and chemical contaminants through agricultural and industrial practices and urban sprawl. Recent events also indicate that we must also consider potential terrorist threats to the water supply.

There is a clear need for a strong response from the numerous public health and community agencies, water utilities, federal regulatory agencies, and private partners involved in water protection. Coordination of these partners and delineation of their roles is necessary to implement steps to protect the public health from natural and deliberate contamination of our waters. However, it must also be recognized that the current public health system's ability to detect and report problems, conduct research regarding potential problems, and disseminate information to the public is severely undermined by a lack of resources and trained personnel to address the provision of healthy water.

Statement of the desired action(s) to be taken:

CSTE agrees with the CDC vision of a world with healthy water for all. We support the adoption of the Public Health Action Plan and its intent to coordinate with and complement the efforts of many public and private sector partners, including the USEPA, water utilities, and state and local health agencies.

CSTE also supports the four strategies outlined in the plan:

1. Assess the burden of waterborne illness and identify emerging threats
2. Enhance state, federal, and international capacity to address waterborne illness
3. Protect people from waterborne illness through public health action
4. Evaluate the effectiveness of interventions to control or prevent waterborne illness

We strongly urge that the Secretary of the USEPA, the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services and the Director of the CDC, take immediate action to implement the plan, and address additional resources necessary to carry out the strategies outlined in the plan.

Public Health Impact:

The resolution supports the provision of healthy water for the public via a coordinated effort among various public health agencies and partners.

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Coordination:

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