

Infectious Diseases—Healthcare Associated Infections (HAI)

Assignment Description

The New Jersey Department of Health (NJDOH), located in central New Jersey, provides public health services to over eight million New Jersey residents. The fellow will work with the NJDOH Communicable Disease Service (CDS), which is comprised of two area-specific programs, Infectious and Zoonotic Diseases and Vaccine-Preventable Diseases. CDS provides guidance to local health departments and health care facilities statewide regarding routine investigations of reportable communicable diseases and outbreaks as well as public health emergencies, including emerging infections and events related to bioterrorism. CDS has approximately 70 staff members who represent a range of expertise, including physicians, veterinarians, nurses, epidemiologists, and health educators, who are available to the fellow for consultation and/or collaboration. The fellow will not only have the opportunity to work with these CDS professionals, which includes the State HAI Coordinator, but also the staff members of the Office of Healthcare Quality Assessment responsible for quality metrics of state and federal HAI reporting and HAI prevention practices.

Day-to-Day Activities

The fellow will be an integral part of the HAI team. The fellow's anticipated day-to-day activities will include work on long-term analytic projects, which will involve collecting and analyzing epidemiological data and reporting findings and acute outbreak investigations.

Routine activities will include:

- Long-term analytic projects, which would involve collecting and analyzing epidemiological data and reporting findings
- Acute outbreak investigations, that involve field investigations, developing and/or administering questionnaires, developing databases/linelists, analyzing data, participating in conference calls with local, federal, and other state public health agencies
- -Weekly meetings with mentors and the State HAI Coordinator.
- -Investigation of HAI related reports, including viral hepatitis antibiotic resistant organisms, single cases of legionellosis associated with a health care setting and other pathogens;
- -Weekly meetings with CDS epidemiologists, subject matter experts and generalists who work closely with, mentor and train local health investigators, regarding current investigations/outbreaks, topics presented at professional meetings, and communicable disease issues/problems throughout the state;
- -Phone duty once a week (CDS epidemiologists rotate daily to answer phone inquiries from public health and health care partners regarding communicable disease issues).
- -Capacity building (education, technical assistance) and engagement of Tier II and III health care facilities on infection control and best practices.
- Oral and poster presentations to the public and health professionals

- Access to statewide in-person and online public health trainings, e.g., SAS refresher course, Public Health Media Training, Communicable Disease Investigator Training, Introduction to Logic Models
- Participation in CDS off-hours “on call” approximately twice a year

Potential Projects

- Investigations of outbreaks – both healthcare and community associated. The Fellow will have numerous opportunities to lead and/or participate in outbreak investigations; CDS receives over 200 reports of communicable disease outbreaks of various etiologies among various settings each year. In collaboration with staff from CDS and local health jurisdictions, the Fellow will assist healthcare facilities in the detection, reporting, and investigation of outbreaks. The fellow will be encouraged to analyze the epidemiologic data obtained during the investigation to formulate infection prevention and control guidance. It is anticipated that this experience may be applied to public health rule-making or the development of guidance documents that can be shared with other public health partners.
- Analyzing National Healthcare Safety Network (NHSN) data;
- Evaluating the impact of select infection control measures on reducing hospital-onset MRSA or other health-care associated infections;
- Evaluating impact of healthcare worker influenza vaccination in acute and long-term care facilities;
- Assess the validity of using aggregate cumulative antibiogram data from hospitals to estimate the statewide prevalence of select antimicrobial-resistant bacteria, especially CRE;
- Assist NJDOH in assessing increases in scabies outbreak in healthcare settings; update scabies outbreak guidance documents;
- Assist NJDOH in assessing HAI reporting requirements in NJ regulations during regulation review, possibly impacting future direction of HAI reporting in NJ.
- Works closely with other areas in NJDOH, depending on the project/investigation, including the Consumer, Environmental and Occupational Health Service; the Division of Public Health Infrastructure, Laboratories and Emergency Preparedness; the Division of HIV/SIDS, TB and STD Services and the Division of Health Care Quality and Oversight. The Fellow will have opportunities to collaborate with the NJDOH Center for Health Statistics, which oversees areas including the state's Behavioral Risk Factor Survey, Healthy NJ 2010, and vital statistics analyses.
- The Fellow will also have the opportunity to collaborate with outside stakeholders dependent on the investigation or project (e.g., Association for Professionals in Infection Control and Epidemiology, Healthcare Quality Strategies, Inc. (NJ QIO), the NJ Hospital Association, professional organizations, Occupational Safety and Health Administration regional offices, law enforcement agencies).

Preparedness Role

In the event of a public health emergency, the fellow will be part of the CDS response team (which includes sub-teams in the areas of business continuity, Emergency Call Center, communications, epidemiology/surveillance, and data management). The fellow will serve in either the epidemiologic/surveillance or data management sub-teams.

Assignment Location: New Jersey Department of Health
Trenton, NJ

Primary Mentor: Edward Lifshitz, MD, FACP
Medical Director

Secondary Mentor: Rebecca Greeley, MPH
Epidemiologist