



Core Public Health Worker Competencies for Emergency Preparedness and Response

INTRODUCTION

Using Core Competencies

I. The following pages provide core competencies in emergency preparedness for public health workers. Some are applicable to every worker; others are specific to those in administrative, professional, and technical or support positions. Core competencies can be used in:

1. Updating/revising job descriptions:
Does each job description in public health include reference to emergency responsibilities and tasks?
2. As an outline for new employee orientation and employee training:
The specifics of the agency plan, the organizational chart, and the employees place in the jurisdictional plan are needed to make these competencies meaningful. The size of the jurisdiction and agency will dictate how general or specific an individual's job may be.
3. Self-assessment by public health employees:
Am I able to ...

Training for and measurement of these core competencies in public health emergency preparedness requires tailoring them to the structure and function of the individual public health agency.

II. The general role of public health in emergencies is an extension of the general mission of public health:

to promote physical and mental health and prevent disease, injury, and disability (from Public Health in America).

Depending upon the type of emergency and the decisions about emergency response made within a given jurisdiction, the public health agency may be in the lead position, in a collaborative role, or in a secondary/supportive role. In order for the agency to fulfill its role, the public health agency staff must be competent to carry out their responsibilities.

Core competencies such as these cannot replace the specific description of any job in public health, nor the specific emergency plan for any public health organization. They can, if mastered, assure that the individual public health worker will be able to perform his/her job and his/her functions in emergency circumstances.



Emergency Preparedness Competencies for All Public Health Workers

In order for the public health system to meet performance standards in emergency preparedness all public health workers must be competent to:

1. **Describe** the public health role in emergency response in a range of emergencies that might arise. (E.g. *"This department provides surveillance, investigation and public information in disease outbreaks and collaborates with other agencies in biological, environmental, and weather emergencies."*)
2. **Describe** the chain of command in emergency response
3. **Identify and locate** the agency emergency response plan (or the pertinent portion of the plan).
4. **Describe** his/her functional role(s) in emergency response and **demonstrate** his/her role(s) in regular drills.
5. **Demonstrate** correct use of all communication equipment used for emergency communication (phone, fax, radio, etc.).
6. **Describe** communication role(s) in emergency response:
 - Within agency
 - Media
 - General public
 - Personal (family, neighbors)
7. **Identify** limits to own knowledge/skill/authority and **identify** key system resources for referring matters that exceed these limits.
8. **Apply** creative problem solving and flexible thinking to unusual challenges within his/her functional responsibilities and **evaluate** effectiveness of all actions taken.
9. **Recognize** deviations from the norm that might indicate an emergency and **describe** appropriate action (e.g. communicate clearly within the chain of command).

Additional Competencies for Public Health Leaders/Administrators¹

The following competencies will be combined with those of the Professional (see below) for leader/administrators who also have medical, nursing or other professional duties.

1. **Describe** the chain of command and management system ("incident command system" or similar protocol) for emergency response in the jurisdiction.
2. **Communicate** public health information/roles/capacities/legal authority accurately to all emergency response partners, such as other public health agencies, other health agencies, and other government agencies during planning, drills and actual emergencies (e.g. includes contributing to effective community-wide response through leadership, team building, negotiation and conflict resolution).
3. **Maintain** regular communication with emergency response partners (includes maintaining a current directory of partners and identifying appropriate methods for contact in emergencies).
4. **Assure** that the agency (or agency unit) has a written, updated plan for major categories of emergencies that respects the culture of the community.
5. **Assure** that the agency (or agency unit) regularly practices all parts of emergency response.
6. **Evaluate** every emergency response drill/emergency response to identify needed internal/external improvements
7. **Assure** that knowledge/skill gaps identified through emergency response planning, drills and evaluation are filled.



Additional Competencies for Public Health Professionals²

The following competencies will be combined with those of the Leader/Administrator (see above) for professionals who also have management duties.

1. **Demonstrate** readiness to apply professional skills to a range of emergency situations during regular drills (e.g. access, use and interpretation of surveillance data; access to and use of lab resources; access to and use of science-based investigation protocols and risk assessment; selection and use of appropriate personal protective equipment).
2. **Maintain** regular communication with partner professionals in other agencies involved in emergency response (e.g. includes contributing to effective community wide response through leadership, team building, negotiation and conflict resolution).
3. **Participate** in continuing education to maintain up to date knowledge in areas relevant to emergency response (e.g. emerging infectious diseases, hazardous materials, diagnostic tests, etc.)

Additional Competencies for Public Health Technical³ & Support⁴ Staff

1. **Demonstrate** the use of equipment (including personal protective equipment) and skills associated with his/her functional role in emergency response during regular drills
2. **Describe** at least one resource for backup/support in key areas of responsibility.

¹**Leader/Administrative** occupations involve the exercise of analytical ability, judgment, discretion, personal responsibility, and the application of a substantial body of knowledge of principles, concepts, and practices applicable to one or more fields of administration or management. NB: *Public health leaders/administrators may also be public health professionals serving in a leadership/administrative capacity.*

²**Professional** occupations require knowledge in a field of science or learning characteristically acquired through education or training equivalent to a bachelor's degree or higher degree with major study in or pertinent to the specialized field. The work of a professional occupation requires the exercise of discretion, judgment, and personal responsibility for the application of an organized body of knowledge that is constantly studied to make new discoveries and interpretations, and to improve the data, materials, and methods.

³**Technical** occupations involve non-routine work and are typically associated with, and supportive of a professional or administrative field. Such occupations involve extensive practical knowledge gained through on-the-job experience or training less than that represented by college graduation and involve substantial elements of the work of the professional or administrative field, but requires less than full competence in the field involved.

⁴**Clerical/Support** occupations involve structured work in support of office, business, or fiscal operations; duties are performed according to established policies or techniques and require training, experience, or working knowledge related to the tasks to be performed.