

# **ENVIRONMENTAL PUBLIC HEALTH TRACKING ASTHO FELLOWSHIP REPORT**

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Association of State and Territorial Health Officials  
Environmental Public Health Tracking: State-to-State Peer Fellowship Program  
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## **Introduction**

In 2014, the Tennessee Department of Health's (TDH) Environmental Epidemiology Program (EEP) participated in the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials' (ASTHO) Environmental Public Health Tracking (EPHT) State-to-State Fellowship Program for submission of Hospital Discharge Data to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) National Environmental Public Health Tracking Network.

Since 1982, the Environmental Epidemiology Program (EEP) has been Tennessee's environmental public health response program. EEP is part of Communicable and Environmental Diseases & Emergency Preparedness (CEDEP) of the TDH. EEP's participation as an Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) Cooperative Agreement partner has helped us become a successful, efficient, and trusted environmental public health program. We have investigated many different environmental exposure scenarios and, in response, implemented action plans to protect public health. We have provided assistance to ATSDR, the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), our state regulatory agency the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation (TDEC), the Tennessee Department of Agriculture, as well as to concerned citizens, local governments, and legislative officials. We maintain a surveillance system as part of the ATSDR's National Toxic Substance Incidents Program (NTSIP). We record acute toxic chemical release incidents to develop prevention and outreach activities. On January 1, 2013, carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning became a reportable event in Tennessee. EEP is now tracking carbon monoxide poisoning events throughout the state.

In 2013, TDH's EEP participated in the ASTHO's Tracking Peer-to-Peer Fellowship Program. Missouri (MO) was our mentor state. Major accomplishments of the fellowship included a site visit to MO and an in-person networking session at CDC. During the site visit, TDH EEP developed a good working relationship with MO. MO's EPHT staff explained their online, interactive, and queryable EPHT portal. TDH EEP learned the strengths of a good EPHT portal as well as some pitfalls to avoid. During the networking session, the CDC tracking branch shared emerging methods, upcoming events, and ongoing work being done within the EPHT network on the national scale. There was a discussion of the "Future of the Fellowship: Hospitalization Data." This discussion helped EEP immensely by talking about problems and solutions of implementing EPHT in the future. A substantial benefit was the networking opportunity with other EPHT fellows and CDC staff. The contacts made during the session will be useful resources as Tennessee moves forward to implement EPHT.

## **Project description**

The purpose of this project was to acquire and submit hospital discharge data for four health outcomes: asthma, carbon monoxide poisoning, heart attacks, and heat stress illness.

Some cities in Tennessee are always on the list of the 10-worst cities for allergies in the nation according to Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America. Tennessee's asthma rate per 10, 000 population was 9.8 for 2012, according to Tennessee Hospital Discharge Inpatient Data. Tracking hospitalizations, emergency department visits, and deaths data for asthma can be used to guide planning efforts, to target interventions, and to serve as a baseline to track asthma trends and evaluate efforts to decrease the burden of this disease.

Heart disease is the leading cause of death for Tennesseans, with stroke closely following as the third leading cause of mortality. Tennessee ranked 6th highest among states in mortality due to heart disease and ranked 3rd highest in stroke mortality. According to Tennessee Hospital Discharge Inpatient Data, the rate of heart attack per 10, 000 populations were 24.5 for 2012. Tracking heart attack data can be used to target susceptible populations and provide public health messaging, prevention and intervention activities for these two costly and destructive conditions.

Hospital Discharge Inpatient Data reported the rate of 9.8 per 100, 0000 population for carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning in Tennessee for 2012. CO poisoning occurs as the result of routine domestic, occupational, and recreational activities. Because of its frequency, severity, and preventability as well as the effectiveness of simple preventive measures such as the installation of a CO alarm CO poisoning is a critical health issue for public health surveillance. CO poisoning is now reportable in Tennessee. A comprehensive national CO poisoning surveillance framework is needed to obtain accurate estimates of CO poisoning burden and guide prevention efforts. Tracking hospitalization data will allow TDH EEP to develop targeted messaging for vulnerable populations. It will also support national public health prevention and intervention activities to reduce associated morbidity and mortality.

Each year many Tennesseans suffer from heat-related illnesses, with some cases resulting in death. According to Hospital Discharge Inpatient Data, the rate of heat stress per 100, 0000 in Tennessee was 4.9 for 2012. The elderly and the chronically ill are more vulnerable to the effects of high temperature and humidity. Monitors high temperatures and humidity across the state can help prevent heat-related illness and death.

## **REPORT ON TRACKING ACTIVITIES**

### **I. Participate on a web conference kick-off meeting Feb 25, 2014**

On February 25, 2014, Dr. Sutapa Mukhopadhyay, the principal investigator (PI) of this project, Mr. Craig Shepherd, Director of Environmental Epidemiology, and Mr. David Borowski, Assistant Director of Environmental Epidemiology participated in a web conference with ASTHO staff, CDC tracking branch, and other 2014 awardees. EEP is grateful to ASTHO for making the fellowship possible.

#### **Accomplishments**

Tennessee EEP has a better understanding of CDC's Standard for Nationally Consistent Data Measures (NCDM) guidelines for hospital discharge data. After the Q/A session, Tennessee gained a comprehensive understanding of the process of data collection, data cleaning, and data formatting.

### **II. Participate on a CDC Share point guided tour webinar March 12, 2014**

On March 12, 2014, our PI was participated in a webinar focused on EPHT share point. From this webinar Tennessee learned more about the EPHT share point, data submission guidelines, guidance for data measures, and metadata creation.

#### **Accomplishments**

Tennessee EEP had a better understanding of EPHT's share point site. How to look and where to look for data submission guidelines, metadata creation tools, and the necessary contacts for different areas of expertise.

### **III. Meeting with data stewards on March 14, 2014**

TDH's Division of Policy Planning and Assessment (PPA) is responsible for collecting all the hospitalization data in Tennessee. On March 14, 2014, EEP team had a planning meeting with PPA team. During this meeting PPA stated that TDH could not share unsuppressed aggregate data with CDC.

#### **Accomplishments**

PPA provided all the necessary steps to request raw data for each of the four health outcomes for this project. Tennessee EEP learned each and every step of data request process.

After several TDH leadership discussions and meetings, it was finally determined late July 2014 that TDH could submit unsuppressed aggregate data to CDC for EPHT.

### **IV. Working with data on March-April, 2014**

Hospital discharge data are a complete collection of patient demographic, clinical, and billing data for all payer types for all patients admitted to a licensed acute care hospital in a state during a calendar quarter or year. Hospital discharge data are population-based representing a known population residing in a defined geographic area. These data contain all patient hospitalizations from short-term-care facilities excluding federal hospitals (Veterans Administration and Indian Health Service) as well as specialty-care hospitals.

EEP worked with PPA to identify the hospitalization data for tracking. EEP signed data use agreements with PPA including 'Request for Data Form' and 'Data Release Awareness Statement'.

Hospital discharge data were collected and compiled from hospitals by the Tennessee Department of Health. Some hospitals sent their data directly to the Department; some sent their data via the Tennessee Hospital Association. All data went through the same editing and processing. The Department verifies the data with the reporting hospitals and creates several additional fields based on the submitted data. The data were then available to the Department for research and for responding to information requests.

PPA provided the data files and the relevant data manuals to EEP's PI. PPA uploaded the SAS data file onto our FTP server using FileZilla. They provided secure e-mail with password to open the files. Each year had two separate inpatient and outpatient data files. PPA also provided the technical support to understand the data files.

### **V. Processing data on April-June, 2014**

Tennessee will provide hospitalization data for four health outcomes for 12 years from 2000-2011. Calendar year 2013 data will not be ready until January 2015. We are not able to provide 2012 data because in order to have complete admission date information using discharge-based datasets, it is necessary to have the dataset of the year of interest and the subsequent year.

After acquiring the data, it was cleaned and formatted to the national standards using a SAS program. We created measures and indicators with the SAS program. We got tremendous support from our PPA team to understand the format of the data. We got support and guidance from CDC's tracking team throughout this project. Our mentor state, MO, shared their SAS code with us and some examples of their metadata records. CDC's tracking team gave technical support for processing and formatting the data.

Patient count was based on admit date not the discharge date. The dataset was extracted from the Tennessee Hospital Discharge Data System (HDDS). HDDS contains inpatient hospitalization and emergency department data. All acute care and rehabilitation hospitals, excluding federal and prison hospitals, report data by discharge year on a quarterly basis. The records for all four health outcomes were selected based on admission date occurring in calendar year 2000-2012, the appropriate diagnoses in all the diagnoses field, state of residence of Tennessee, and hospitals located in Tennessee. Once the relevant records were selected, duplicate records were deleted using combinations of admit and discharge dates, patient discharge status, age, race, sex, ethnicity, patient control number, county and residence zip code, and hospital number. Ethnicity was collected as part of race item in 2000-2006 data files.

The variables such as age, sex, race, ethnicity, and county were formatted according to the *CDC's Standard for Nationally Consistent Data Measures Guidelines*. The data had been categorized based on age, gender, race, and ethnicity for all four health outcomes.

The diagnosis codes used for different data measures were based on *CDC's Standard for Nationally Consistent Data Measures Guidelines*. CDC's tracking team gave support for case definitions for each health outcome. Their How-to-Guide listed step-by-step instructions on how data should be processed in preparation for submission, data dictionaries which describe data variables and required formats, indicator templates that provided formal documentation of a particular indicator and its measures. We counted the number of unintentional fire and non-fire related CO poisoning cases.

## **VI. Working with metadata on April-June, 2014**

Metadata records were created for the dataset by using the EPHT Metadata Creation Tool, Version 1.1. The CDC tracking team gave support for the metadata template which described the standard for metadata records on the Tracking Network. Completeness of the source data was checked and calculated using SAS program. It was incorporated in the metadata record. Ninety-six (96) metadata records were created for four health outcomes over 12 years. We shared the metadata with our data steward before sending it to CDC for validation.

### **Accomplishments**

Tennessee EEP gained understanding and experience in using the metadata creation tool for EPHT.

### **Learning experience**

One learning objective for TDH EEP was to understand hospitalization data. A second objective was to learn about the four data measures. Another objective was to get guidance on how to prepare data for CDC's EPHT network. Lessons learned are summarized below:

- Tracking is a partnership program. Building a partnership with data stewards is the first step of data acquisition.
- NCDM guidelines are critical for tracking program. Identified data access and format issues according to the national standards.
- Hospitalization data is an important component in tracking program. Participation in this fellowship allowed TDH EEP to understand hospitalization data in greater detail.
- Communication is a key component for tracking. TDH EEP learned greater detail about the importance of communication between data stewards, ASTHO, and CDC.

### **Application**

TDH EEP will share this fellowship report with our data steward and with management. After completing this fellowship, our next step will be to develop a strategic goal to implement EPHT in TN. Creating Tennessee's own EPHT portal will be our long-term goal.

### **Anticipated challenges**

Without dedicated funding, implementing an EPHT portal will be a challenge. Tennessee needs dedicated staff to maintain a statewide program. Without staff funded and dedicated to EPHT, we can only shuffle our existing staffs' responsibilities for a limited amount of time to address additional workload/projects. Of course using this approach does not allow us to sustain momentum. We are optimistic our participation as an ASTHO fellow will increase our ability to qualify for funding to sustain and support a statewide EPHT program in the future.

### **Future directions**

TDH EEP is planning to sustain the scope of this project by continuing to upload data for four conditions in CDC's Tracking Network beyond the project period. This will enable us to determine the morbidity and mortality of adverse health outcomes within the state and subsequently determine trends in incidence, identify locations of increased disease, and ultimately link them with information on levels of environmental contaminants. The future outcome of this project will be to identify Tennessee's high risk populations for those health outcomes as determined by social factors and geographic areas. Tracking data will help identify health disparities among Tennesseans. With this knowledge, TDH will be in a position to institute changes in public health policy with the goal of preventing and reducing adverse health outcomes.

EEP's new focus will be to prepare a strategic plan to implement EPHT in Tennessee. Our long-term objective will be to build a tracking portal to provide comprehensive environmental and public health data as outlined in CDC's *Guide to Building an Environmental Public Health Tracking Network*.