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What is Case Surveillance? | National Notifiable Diseases Surveillance System (NNDSS) | CDC  
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National Notifiable Diseases Surveillance System (NNDSS)  
Explore Topics  
Search  
Search  
For Everyone  
About About National Notifiable Diseases Surveillance System  
What is Case Surveillance?  
Case Surveillance Modernization  
Infectious Disease Tables  
Non-Infectious Disease Data  
Technical Resource Center  
Case Surveillance in Action  
Contact Us  
View all  
Related Topics:  
NDC Application  
View All  
search  
close search  
search  
National Notifiable Diseases Surveillance System (NNDSS)  
Menu  
Close  
search  
For Everyone  
About About National Notifiable Diseases Surveillance System  
What is Case Surveillance?  
Case Surveillance Modernization  
Infectious Disease Tables  
Non-Infectious Disease Data  
Technical Resource Center  
Case Surveillance in Action  
Contact Us  
View All  
Related Topics  
NDC Application  
View All  
National Notifiable Diseases Surveillance System (NNDSS)  
About About National Notifiable Diseases Surveillance System  
What is Case Surveillance?  
Case Surveillance Modernization  
Infectious Disease Tables  
Non-Infectious Disease Data  
Technical Resource Center  
Case Surveillance in Action  
Contact Us  
View All  
November 20, 2024  
What is Case Surveillance?  
Highlights  
Case surveillance helps professionals understand diseases and their spread and take action to control outbreaks.  
Public health agencies collect data about diseases and conditions that pose serious health threats.  
Health departments notify healthcare professionals, facilities, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to monitor, control, and prevent disease spread to protect the public.  
Case surveillance  
Case surveillance is foundational to public health practice. It helps us to understand diseases and their spread and determine appropriate actions to control outbreaks. Case surveillance occurs each time public health agencies at the local, state, or national levels collect information about a  
case  
or person diagnosed with a disease or condition that poses a serious health threat to Americans. These diseases and conditions include:  
Infectious diseases, such as coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19).  
Foodborne outbreaks, such as  
E.coli.  
Noninfectious conditions, such as lead poisoning.  
Case surveillance starts at local, state, and territorial public health departments. Local laws and regulations specify which diseases and conditions must be reported. The health departments work with healthcare providers, laboratories, hospitals, and other partners to get the information needed to monitor, control, and prevent these  
reportable  
diseases and conditions in their communities.  
Reporting to CDC  
Health departments also notify CDC about certain conditions so we can track them for the whole country. CDC monitors about 120 of these  
notifiable  
diseases and conditions at the national level. This important step helps protect the health of individual communities and the nation. Following standard case definitions, case surveillance captures information that public health officials can use to understand where diseases are occurring, how they can be prevented, and which groups are most heavily impacted. This information includes:  
Who is affected—the demographic, clinical, and epidemiologic characteristics.  
Where they are affected—the geographic distribution of disease.  
How they are affected—the course of clinical illness and care received.  
Resources  
National Notifiable Diseases Surveillance System - Infographic  
National Notifiable Diseases Surveillance System - Overview Fact Sheet  
Reportable or notifiable  
The information below describes the differences between reportable and notifiable diseases or conditions.  
Reportable or Notifiable: What’s the Difference?  
Reportable Diseases and Conditions  
Notifiable Diseases and Conditions  
Each state or territory sets local laws and rules for which diseases and conditions must be reported.  
The Council of State and Territorial Epidemiologists and CDC identify the list of notifiable diseases and conditions.  
Healthcare professionals, laboratories, hospitals, and other providers must tell public health departments when a person is diagnosed.  
States voluntarily inform CDC when a person meets certain criteria to become a case.  
Public health departments collect information about the person and how they became ill.  
Case records do not contain personally identifiable information.  
This information is used to locate the source of an outbreak and prevent spread.  
CDC uses data to monitor, measure, and alert individual communities or the nation to outbreaks and other public health threats.  
The list of diseases and conditions can change every year.  
The list of about 120 diseases and conditions is updated every year.  
National Notifiable Diseases Surveillance System  
CDC conducts case surveillance through the National Notifiable Diseases Surveillance System (NNDSS). In the case surveillance process, about 3,000 health departments gather and use data on disease cases to protect their local communities. Through NNDSS, CDC receives and uses these data to keep people healthy and defend America from health threats.  
CDC centers  
CDC programs responsible for national surveillance, prevention, and control of infectious and noninfectious conditions are found in the following centers:  
Center for Global Health (CGH).  
National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion (NCCDPHP).  
National Center for Emerging and Zoonotic Infectious Diseases (NCEZID).  
National Center for Environmental Health (NCEH).  
National Center for HIV/AIDS, Viral Hepatitis, STD, and TB Prevention (NCHHSTP).  
National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases (NCIRD).  
National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH).  
These programs collaborate with the Council of State and Territorial Epidemiologists to determine which conditions reported to local, state, and territorial public health departments are nationally notifiable. The Council of State and Territorial Epidemiologists brings together disease and surveillance experts at CDC and in the health departments to determine what types of data should be included in national notifications.  
How the data is used  
NNDSS receives, processes, and provides data on national notifiable diseases to programs across CDC. The programs use these data to:  
Recognize disease outbreaks.  
Track the spread of disease at the state, regional, and national levels.  
Identify geographic areas of concern and inform state decision makers.  
Help state and local public health departments better control disease by identifying groups most at risk.  
Evaluate and fund disease control activities.  
NNDSS by the numbers  
About  
120 diseases  
are under surveillance through NNDSS, including:  
Infectious diseases.  
Bioterrorism agents.  
Sexually transmitted diseases.  
Noninfectious conditions.  
Nearly  
2.7 million disease cases  
are reported through NNDSS each year.  
About  
3,000 public health departments  
send disease data to  
60  
state, territorial, and other public health  
departments, who then send the data to CDC.  
100% of the American  
population  
is protected through NNDSS.  
NNDSS modernization  
As technology, data, and exchange standards evolve, CDC is strengthening and modernizing the infrastructure that supports NNDSS. As part of the  
Data Modernization Initiative  
, CDC is enhancing the ability of NNDSS to provide comprehensive, timely, and high-quality data for public health decision making. Through this multi-year initiative, CDC is making the NNDSS technological infrastructure more robust so that it is based on interoperable, standardized data and exchange mechanisms.  
Learn more  
How We Conduct Case Surveillance  
The process and data systems that NNDSS uses to collect national notifiable disease case data.  
Nov. 20, 2024  
Case Surveillance History  
The history of major milestones in the advancement of case surveillance.  
Nov. 20, 2024  
Paperwork Reduction Act burden statements  
National Notifiable Diseases Surveillance System  
OMB No. 0920-0728 (Expiration Date: 03/31/2027). The public reporting burden of this collection of information is estimated to average 20 minutes per response for states, territories, freely associated states, and cities. This includes the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. An agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to all collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden to – CDC/ATSDR Reports Clearance Officer; 1600 Clifton Road NE, MS H21-8, Atlanta, Georgia 30333 ATTN: PRA (0920-0728).  
Minimal Data Necessary for Case Data During an Emergency Response  
OMB No. 0920-XXXX (Expiration Date: 09/30/2027). The public reporting burden of this collection of information is estimated to average 30 minutes per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. An agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB Control Number. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden to CDC/ATSDR Reports Clearance Officer, 1600 Clifton Road NE, MS H21-8, Atlanta, Georgia 30333; ATTN: PRA 0920-XXXX.  
On This Page  
Case surveillance  
Reportable or notifiable  
National Notifiable Diseases Surveillance System  
NNDSS by the numbers  
NNDSS modernization  
Paperwork Reduction Act burden statements  
November 20, 2024  
Sources  
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LinkedIn  
Twitter  
Syndicate  
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Office of Public Health Data, Surveillance, and Technology (OPHDST)  
National Notifiable Diseases Surveillance System (NNDSS)  
NNDSS receives and shares case data from state, local, and territorial health departments to help public health monitor, control, and prevent serious diseases.  
View All  
About About National Notifiable Diseases Surveillance System  
What is Case Surveillance?  
Case Surveillance Modernization  
Infectious Disease Tables  
Non-Infectious Disease Data  
Technical Resource Center  
Case Surveillance in Action  
Contact Us  
View All  
Sign up for Email Updates  
Contact Us  
Contact Us  
Call 800-232-4636  
Contact CDC  
About CDC  
About CDC  
Organization  
Budget & Funding  
Careers & Jobs  
Policies  
Accessibility  
External Links  
Privacy  
Web Policies  
FOIA  
OIG  
No Fear Act  
Nondiscrimination  
Vulnerability Disclosure Policy  
Languages  
Languages  
EspaÃ±ol  
Language Assistance  
EspaÃ±ol  
ç¹é«ä¸­æ  
Tiáº¿ng Viá»t  
íêµ­ì´  
Tagalog  
Ð ÑÑÑÐºÐ¸Ð¹  
Ø§ÙØ¹Ø±Ø¨ÙØ©  
KreyÃ²l Ayisyen  
FranÃ§ais  
Polski  
PortuguÃªs  
Italiano  
Deutsch  
æ¥æ¬èª  
ÙØ§Ø±Ø³Û  
English  
Archive  
CDC Archive  
Public Health Publications  
Contact Us  
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About CDC  
Organization  
Budget & Funding  
Careers & Jobs  
About CDC  
Policies  
Accessibility  
External Links  
Privacy  
Web Policies  
FOIA  
OIG  
No Fear Act  
Nondiscrimination  
Vulnerability Disclosure Policy  
Languages  
Languages  
EspaÃ±ol  
Language Assistance  
EspaÃ±ol  
ç¹é«ä¸­æ  
Tiáº¿ng Viá»t  
íêµ­ì´  
Tagalog  
Ð ÑÑÑÐºÐ¸Ð¹  
Ø§ÙØ¹Ø±Ø¨ÙØ©  
KreyÃ²l Ayisyen  
FranÃ§ais  
Polski  
PortuguÃªs  
Italiano  
Deutsch  
æ¥æ¬èª  
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English  
Archive  
CDC Archive  
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