

**New Jersey Department of Health**  
**Health Officer Communicable Disease Communications Protocol**

New Jersey Administrative Code (N.J.A.C.) Title 8 Chapter 57 is designed to promote the identification and reporting of specified communicable diseases so that public health officials can take appropriate action to prevent the further spread of those diseases to other persons and thereby preserve, maintain, or improve public health. This chapter establishes requirements for reporting of communicable diseases identified by health care providers and institutions; reporting of laboratory tests and submission of specimens that may be indicative of communicable diseases by clinical laboratory directors; and investigation requirements/regulatory actions to be taken by the local health officers (HOs). This chapter also defines the mechanism by which all health care providers and administrators shall report information related to a communicable disease to the health officer of the jurisdiction where the ill or infected person lives, or if unknown, wherein the diagnosis is made.

NJDOH recognizes that health officers cannot investigate or be involved with every report of communicable disease and must rely on staff within their department to assist with these activities. Health officers must, however, be appraised of disease/outbreak investigations occurring within their jurisdiction to ensure compliance with N.J.A.C. 8:57. This document outlines the communication among stakeholders during communicable disease outbreaks and investigations.

- Any outbreak, immediately reportable condition or event of public health importance that is reported directly to the local HO:
  - The HO or designee receiving a report of an outbreak, immediately reportable condition or event of public health importance should notify NJDOH CDS immediately by telephone (see contact information below).
  - When reporting to NJDOH CDS, the reporter shall indicate who the primary local health department (LHD) contact is for the outbreak, immediately reportable condition or event of public health importance. This person will serve as the primary disease investigator and is expected to perform the investigation, create/update information in the Communicable Disease Reporting and Surveillance System (CDRSS) or other data system specified by CDS, and update the HO on all investigation activities.
  - If HO designee is the reporter, it is their responsibility to notify the HO that the report to NJDOH CDS has been made.
  - The HO should be copied on all email communication related to the outbreak/investigation. This includes communications between CDS and LHD or with external stakeholders.
  
- Any outbreak, immediately reportable condition or event of public health importance that is reported directly to NJDOH CDS:
  - NJDOH CDS will utilize the following mechanisms to communicate information regarding the report to the HO:
    - Contact information located in the directory of LHDs located on this NJDOH website: <http://nj.gov/health/lh/directory/lhdselectcounty.shtml>

- If NJDOH CDS is unable to reach the HO or designee within one hour of initial call using the above mechanism, the New Jersey Health Alert Network RedBook will be used to make contact with the health officer or designees as defined on this list.
    - Unsuccessful attempts to reach a HO or designees within 2 hours of report receipt will be reported to the Office of Local Public Health.
  - Once notified, the HO will designate a primary disease investigator who is expected to perform the investigation, create/update information in the Communicable Disease Reporting and Surveillance System (CDRSS) or other data system specified by CDS, and update the HO on all investigation activities including communication between CDS and LHD or other external stakeholders.
- Routine communicable disease reports (non-immediate) captured by CDRSS
  - HO will not be routinely notified of communicable disease entered into CDRSS.
  - CDRSS will serve as the notification to the HO of the report. HO should review cases in CDRSS to ensure investigations are conducted in a timely manner and contain complete information.
- Request for routine demographic, clinical or epidemiologic information on a non-immediately reportable communicable disease investigation.
  - HO will not be routinely notified of requests for information on non-immediately reportable diseases. All inquiries by NJDOH CDS will be made via telephone or email to the Investigator listed in CDRSS or as designated by HO. This person is expected to update the HO on all relevant activities and communications.
- Multi-state cluster investigation
  - HO and Investigator listed in CDRSS will be notified by NJDOH staff via e-mail that the case is part of an in-state cluster or multistate cluster.

### Epidemiological Surge Capacity

If a communicable disease investigation or outbreak requires additional epidemiological resources, HOs can request assistance from the CDS/Regional Epidemiology Program (REP). REP can assign additional epidemiologists to work with LHDs on largescale or complex investigations. All CDS staff are available 24/7 to provide epidemiological assistance to LHDs and can be accessed through the CDS business and after-hours phone numbers.

### **NJDOH CDS Contact Information**

During Business Hours (M-F 8am to 5pm) 609-826-5964  
 After business hours, weekends and holiday 609-392-2020

*Updated: September 2015*