

Emergency Preparedness



The mission of local public health departments has expanded in recent years to include readiness for emergency response and recovery. Public health concerns include emerging infectious diseases, possibility of bioterrorism incidents, disease pandemics, and public health impacts of natural and man-made disasters. The Dakota County Public Health Department and other public health agencies use rigorous drills and exercises—the same tools that have proven effective for the U.S. military, law enforcement, and firefighters—to test and improve systems.

Key facts about Emergency Preparedness

Public health departments need to be ready to respond to emergency events. Dakota County has emergency response plans in place and regularly tests them to ensure effectiveness. Dakota County staff has developed collaborative relationships with other agencies to ensure a coordinated response. Public health agencies need to inform the public about the importance of personal and family preparedness - surveys find that members of the public are not as prepared as they should be for emergencies.

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Dakota
COUNTY

Emergencies in Dakota County

- Disasters - natural and man-made - have a significant impact on life, property and the economy every year in the U.S.
- The most common types of hazards in Dakota County are violent storms, extreme temperatures, and floods.
- Over the past several decades, Dakota County had six federal disaster declarations for flooding, severe storms, tornadoes and straight-line winds.
- In recent years, the Dakota County Public Health Department has responded to a number of disease outbreaks, including novel H1N1 influenza, tuberculosis, and pertussis. Staff from Public Health and other departments have also responded to other health hazards, such as a significant mercury spill in 2004.



Emergency Preparedness in Dakota County

- The Dakota County Emergency Preparedness Coordinator in the Sheriff's Office works closely with cities, other county departments, and state agencies to coordinate emergency preparedness and response.
- Each year since 2002, Dakota County has received a Homeland Security Grant that has supported emergency preparedness and financed the purchase of equipment for police, fire and the emergency medical system in the county.
- Equipment purchased includes respirators; radio equipment; search and rescue equipment; trailers and supplies for chemical decontamination and treating mass casualties; and protective suits, helmets and vests.
- Grant funding has also provided support for the Dakota County Communication Center and the Special Operations Team, an emergency response unit made up of firefighters, paramedics, police officers, and sheriff's deputies.

Public health emergencies

- Public health services have historically included preventive medicine, health education, control of communicable diseases, sanitation, and monitoring of environmental hazards.
- Since the 9/11 attack and the anthrax incidents in 2001, the public health system has adopted an "all-hazards" approach to emergencies, including preparing for biological, chemical, radiological, and nuclear terrorism; infectious disease outbreaks; natural disasters; and accidents.

Public health preparedness

- Public health preparedness includes continual testing and updating of plans; collaboration among jurisdictions and organizations; communications; disease surveillance; and recruiting, training and retention of the public health workforce.
- Each year since 2002, the Dakota County Public Health Department has received funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention that has enabled the department to hire staff for coordinating emergency preparedness plans, training and exercises. The grant has also provided funding to purchase equipment and supplies for mass dispensing and other public health responses, personal protective equipment, and communication systems.



Medical Reserve Corps

- Medical Reserve Corps is a nationwide initiative to mobilize and coordinate health care professionals and other volunteers to assist in a public health emergency.
- As of May 2011, the Medical Reserve Corps of Dakota County had 456 registered volunteers. 69% of the volunteers are health professionals; 31% do not have a healthcare background.
- MRC volunteers receive periodic training and participate in both emergency and non-emergency events in Dakota County.



Public readiness for emergencies

- Recommended actions include: create a family communication plan; prepare a disaster kit; and have a three-day supply of food, water and medications.



- The State of Minnesota ranks high nationally in disaster preparedness.
- A 2009 national survey found that 71-74% of Americans had set aside food and water in case of a disaster, but less than half (44%) updated their supplies annually. Fewer had other essentials, such as flashlights, portable radios and first aid kits.

About this Community Health Profile

For more information about the Dakota County Community Health Assessment and Action Planning (CHAAP) process, contact: Melanie Countryman, Epidemiologist (melanie.countryman@co.dakota.mn.us or 651-554-6131).

For more information:

- Dakota County Public Health Department www.dakotacounty.us/publichealth
- Minnesota Department of Health www.health.state.mn.us
- Ready.gov www.ready.gov
- National Association of County and City Health Officials www.naccho.org
- codeReady www.codeready.org



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