

Pediatricians, public health professionals take part in preparedness exercise

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Imagine a smallpox emergency in your state. Would public health and pediatric professionals know how to respond — including how to collaborate and communicate effectively, and obtain the appropriate medical supplies for children?

That was the scenario presented at the Atlanta headquarters of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) during an exercise with members of the AAP Disaster Preparedness Advisory Council (DPAC), CDC leaders and other experts.

Two groups collaborate

The purpose of the training was to improve connectedness between pediatrics and public health; strengthen pediatricians' knowledge of preparedness and response in public health emergencies; and enhance public health professionals' understanding of children's needs in disasters, including the role of pediatricians.



Dr. KrugThe daylong “tabletop” pilot exercise brought together five state teams of pediatricians and public health experts, but it was “more about the collaboration than the disaster,” said DPAC Chair Steven E. Krug, M.D., FAAP, who helped lead the event. Participants traveled from Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma and Texas. At least two people from each of the four-person teams met each other for the first time during the training.

“I thought it was quite successful,” said Dr. Krug. “We demonstrated that if you brought these folks together from the states — chapter leaders and public health leaders — they actually could find common ground, and even in the short timeframe of just a day, could develop ideas that they would use going forward in terms of collaborating to improve readiness and develop some degree of familiarity.”

‘Smallpox outbreak’

The participants discussed how their state plans and procedures would apply in a smallpox outbreak following an accidental lab exposure — an evolving scenario with multiple issues.

They were challenged to come up with the following:

- collaborative strategies to advance pediatric preparedness at state and local levels;
- strategies for the distribution/dispensing of medical countermeasures suitable for pediatric use and related to the smallpox threat; and
- steps states could take to improve communications between pediatric and public health leaders.

AAP President Benard P. Dreyer, M.D., FAAP, and CEO/Executive Director Karen Remley, M.D., M.B.A., M.P.H., FAAP, briefly joined the meeting by teleconference to explain how the Academy would disseminate information to members during a smallpox outbreak.

Discussion points, evaluation, follow-up

Participants identified the following activities as critical before or during an outbreak:

- **Obtain needed expertise** during preparedness planning. To address gaps, pediatricians and public health experts should meet in person to understand each other's assets and expertise.
- **Leverage communication vehicles** that already have capacity to disseminate information quickly in an emergency.
- **Enhance infection control and vaccination strategies**, and use clear messaging.

Among comments in a post-exercise evaluation, participants said they appreciated spending time with in-state partners, hearing ideas from the other states and identifying gaps in knowledge. Meeting leaders plan to follow up with participants on their preparedness activities. Dr. Dziuban

This was a "unique tabletop ... to test the ability of the sectors to work together," said Eric Dziuban, M.D., D.T.M., FAAP, whose CDC roles include serving as team lead of the Children's Preparedness Unit.



About 15% of U.S. children have special health care needs. "So any effective plan to serve children in a disaster setting has to account for that," he added.

"Everyone realizes that children do have particular needs and they're not always well-incorporated into the planning, but it can be hard to know exactly how to tackle that effectively," Dr. Dziuban said. "It really did seem to strike the right note for getting the correct people in a room and begin building those bridges between different sectors."

Resources

- [Pediatric and public health tabletop exercise, Disaster Preparedness Advisory Council web page](#)
- [AAP policy "Medical Countermeasures for Children in Public Health Emergencies, Disasters, or Terrorism"](#)
- [CDC Office of Public Health Preparedness and Response](#)

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