



FOCUS on Field Epidemiology

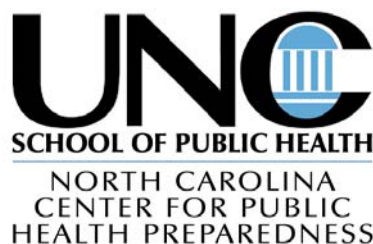
AN OVERVIEW OF OUTBREAK INVESTIGATIONS: DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. We stated in the introduction that, “(t)he decision to investigate may be driven by several important factors. Limitations in financial resources, personnel, or staff expertise may often impede outbreak investigations.” In your health department, how much training is provided for personnel? Are there training areas that you think are necessary for your health department to conduct outbreak investigations, such as epidemiologic methods, computer skills, interacting with the media, or collecting environmental or clinical samples? Does your health department own any of the suggested useful resources listed above?

Discussion cues: If you can identify training needs in your health department, consult your state health department for advice on obtaining training. Formal short courses, such as the Applied Epidemiology courses offered through Emory University School of Public Health in Atlanta (see <http://www.sph.emory.edu/EPICOURSES/abouteia.htm>). If you can’t travel to Atlanta for a week, consider working through the self-directed chapters of “Principles of Epidemiology-An Introduction to Applied Epidemiology and Biostatistics” available through the CDC website (http://www.phppo.cdc.gov/PHTN//catalog/pdf/file/Epi_Intro_1.pdf). Health departments should have access to reference textbooks on epidemiology and infectious agents.

2. In the conclusion, we mentioned that practice makes perfect in outbreak investigations. What is the most memorable outbreak investigation your health department has conducted? What were some of the key lessons learned in these outbreaks? Would the steps listed in this issue of FOCUS have been helpful? Can you think of other important steps in outbreak investigation?

Discussion cues: One important phase of an investigation that local health departments are hesitant to undertake is the analytic study. In discussing your most memorable outbreak, think about the analytic study phase. This is the phase when investigators are able to provide scientific evidence to implicate the source(s) of an outbreak. It might be helpful to discuss an outbreak when you didn’t do an analytic study. Consider reasons why it wasn’t started and think carefully whether it was lack of time, resources, or training.



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