



# FOCUS on Field Epidemiology

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: Public Health Surveillance Systems

1. Given the examples of national and international surveillance systems provided in the *FOCUS* issue, can you think of what might be considered “essential components” of an effective surveillance system?

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), “an effective surveillance system has the following functions:

- detection and notification of health events
- collection and consolidation of pertinent data
- investigation and confirmation (epidemiological, clinical and/or laboratory) of cases or outbreaks
- routine analysis and creation of reports
- feedback of information to those providing the data
- feed-forward (i.e., the forwarding of data to more central levels)
- reporting data to the next administrative level.” (1)

2. Using one of the surveillance systems cited in the *FOCUS* issue, consider how you might incorporate surveillance data into a particular public health program, whether providing a targeted intervention, investigating disease outbreaks, or modifying public health control measures.

There are many possible responses depending on programmatic areas of interest. Two examples are provided below.

- Data from the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) can be used to decide which health-related behavior(s) (e.g., substance use, sexual behavior, physical activity, and nutrition) are most prevalent in your community and which should be a priority for initiating interventions such as tobacco cessation programs, teen pregnancy prevention programs, or initiatives to increase healthy foods in public schools.
- A sentinel surveillance system for influenza-like illness could be initiated at a local level and used not only to monitor community rates of influenza-like illness but also to assist with planning efforts for a possible influenza pandemic.

(1) World Health Organization (WHO). Public health surveillance. WHO Web Site. [http://www.who.int/immunization\\_monitoring/burden/routine\\_surveillance/en/index.html](http://www.who.int/immunization_monitoring/burden/routine_surveillance/en/index.html). Published 2008. Accessed December 3, 2008.



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