



National Association of State EMS Directors
National Association of EMS Physicians
American Public Health Association

Health and Medical Groups Stress Need for Immediate Local Action to Prepare for Mass Casualty Incidents

December 8, 2001 - Representatives of 17 national health and medical organizations concurred today on priority needs for ensuring adequate community readiness for future acts of terrorism. In a meeting jointly sponsored by the American Public Health Association (APHA), the National Association of EMS Physicians (NAEMSP), and the National Association of State EMS Directors (NASEMSD), the organizations focused on two critical short term needs, education of front line health and medical personnel, and priority protection for health care providers during a mass casualty incident.

These health and medical groups, representing the full range of front line health care professions, including emergency medical, public health, and definitive care services, agreed that every community health care provider should achieve the following core competencies within the next 90 days:

- I. **Hazard Surveillance and Detection** – including basic understanding of techniques for identifying harmful agents, procedures for notifying public health and security officials, and methods for enhancing situational awareness and personal safety.

- II. **Incident Response and Management** – including knowledge of protocols for personal protection during mass casualty incidents, health threats and methods of treatment, and the role of the individual health care provider within the overall public health system.

The assembled groups strongly recommend that these competencies be achieved by every local public health provider, including firefighters, emergency medical personnel, law enforcement officers, physicians, and nurses. In addition, the groups stressed the need for similar education for local government officials and other community policymakers.

Dr. Richard Hunt, President of the NAEMSP, pointed out, “This information needs to be common knowledge among our health and medical community. These are fundamental concepts that each of our professions can easily find in our existing curricula and training materials. We just cannot hesitate any longer in getting this information out.”

Mr. Michael Armacost, Colorado State EMS Director and representative of the NASEMSD, further stressed the need for collaboration among the numerous factions of the public health community. "Our terrorism and mass casualty defenses need to be an integral part of our overall EMS and public health system. Most of the skills and resources needed to effectively manage a mass casualty incident, such as detection, reporting, and response, should be part of day-to-day systems of emergency care. We will get double benefit from these efforts. Improving mass casualty readiness will also improve our effectiveness in handling routine community medical emergencies."

Dr. Mohammad Akhter, Executive Director of the APHA, reminded the assembled organizations that we face a potential health care crisis. "We cannot let professional or organizational barriers stand in the way of community protection. The first duty of each of us in public health is to protect our communities from harm. We need to take the lead in ensuring that all our health and medical personnel, as well as our community leaders, quickly acquire the basic knowledge needed to deal with a mass casualty incident. And especially critical is awareness of protocols for protecting our front line providers during an incident. Emergency personnel are our first line of defense. If they fall as casualties or become infected, the community is left defenseless."

Considering the diversity of professional perspectives that need to be covered, the groups agreed that each constituency should identify sources for this essential basic information in their own professional education curricula. If professions need to look outside their own communities, the group recommends that relevant training materials can be found through the websites of several federal agencies, including the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Health and Human Services Office of Emergency Preparedness (OEP).

In addition to identifying immediate awareness and education needs, the assembled health and medical groups considered a range of longer-term needs for ensuring community protection. These recommendations, together with additional detail on educational needs, will be discussed in a joint position paper to be issued by the end of December.

The December 8 gathering of health and medical organizations was conducted with support from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) and the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA). Collaboration among the sponsoring organizations was initiated during a series of EMS and public health roundtables sponsored by NHTSA and HRSA throughout 2000-2001. Following these roundtables, the three sponsoring organizations signed a memorandum of understanding outlining collaborative efforts concerning mass casualty preparation.

Health and medical organizations participating in the December 8 meeting included:

American Ambulance Association

American Board of Ophthalmology American College of Emergency Physicians
American College of Surgeons American Medical Association
American Public Health Association
American Trauma Society
Emergency Nurses Association
Health Resources and Services Administration
International Association of Firefighters
National Association of EMS Educators
National Association of EMS Physicians
National Association of Emergency Medical Technicians
National Association of State EMS Directors
National Highway Traffic Safety Administration
National Volunteer Fire Council
Department of Health and Human Services Office of Emergency Preparedness