



THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

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HEALTH AFFAIRS

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MEMORANDUM FOR SURGEON GENERAL OF THE ARMY
SURGEON GENERAL OF THE NAVY
SURGEON GENERAL OF THE AIR FORCE
CHIEF MEDICAL OFFICER OF THE COAST GUARD
COMMANDER, US ARMY CENTER FOR HEALTH
PROMOTION AND PREVENTIVE MEDICINE
COMMANDING OFFICER, US NAVY ENVIRONMENTAL
HEALTH CENTER
COMMANDER, US AIR FORCE INSTITUTE FOR
OPERATIONAL HEALTH

SUBJECT: New Electronic System for the Early Notification of Community-based
Epidemics Medical Surveillance System and Monitoring Requirements

Effective September 28, 2006, an enhanced version of the Electronic System for the Early Notification of Community-based Epidemics (ESSENCE) medical surveillance system became available to authorized users in the Military Health System (MHS). Use of this tool must be part of everyday medical surveillance activities at all levels of the MHS. As with the previous versions of ESSENCE, I expect each Service to mandate the use of ESSENCE at all installations where there are qualified public health or preventive medicine professionals. Please forward this advisory to the leadership of each medical treatment facility.

ESSENCE is the only MHS-wide monitoring system for detecting and monitoring infectious disease outbreaks in near-real-time. It is a powerful tool that:

- Allows users to track diagnoses not only locally but also regionally.
- Facilitates prompt recognition and investigation of Tri-Service Reportable Medical Events.
- Provides access to patient-identifying information, facilitating local public health work.
- Enables automated e-mail and mobile phone alerts of possible disease outbreaks.

HA POLICY: 07-001

- Enhances execution of the disease surveillance mission in a time of concerns about possible terrorist attacks and the looming specter of an influenza pandemic.

I want to emphasize ESSENCE's contribution to the national public health surveillance system, the need for each installation to conduct ESSENCE monitoring every weekday or, during alert periods, every day, and the importance of good communications among ESSENCE monitors, the local Public Health Emergency Officer (DoDD 6200.3), and the local civilian public health office. Additional guidance is provided in the attachment.

Continuous medical surveillance is a critical part of our Force Health Protection program. Your role in executing this mission is vital. My point of contact for ESSENCE is Col Kenneth L. Cox, who can be contacted by telephone at (703) 578-8524; or by e-mail at *Kenneth.Cox1@tma.osd.mil*.



William Winkenwerder, Jr., MD

GUIDANCE FOR IMPLEMENTING ESSENCE MONITORING AT ALL INSTALLATIONS

ESSENCE is the only MHS-wide monitoring system for detecting and monitoring outbreaks in near-real-time. Previous versions of this web-based software have been active for several years. Both installation and headquarters public health/preventive medicine staff use ESSENCE to monitor for outbreaks of either naturally occurring or deliberately caused disease.

Access to ESSENCE is through the EIDS Portal, <https://EIDS.ha.osd.mil>. New users can request access (via username and password) by contacting eids.access@tma.osd.mil. As the application process may take several weeks, it is imperative to initiate the process of requesting access right away (**Note: the previous version, ESSENCE-IV, will shut down in 60 days after the date of the signed memo**). Once users have access to the application, there is a web-based interactive training tutorial available. Help desk support is available via EIDS@mhs-helpdesk.com, (800) 600-9332 (CONUS) or 1-866-637-8725 (OCONUS). For epidemiological support in interpreting ESSENCE findings or with investigating possible outbreaks, the installation staff should contact their respective Service Public Health Center (USACHPPM, NEHC, AFIOH, or CG-1121). As with all new products, user feedback is critical and will guide 120-day version upgrades. Please forward your suggestions to EIDS@mhs-helpdesk.com.

ESSENCE allows users to track the diagnoses of patients in not only their own, local, outpatient clinics but also in nearby military installations and in regional aggregates. The software captures all outpatient diagnoses from the MHS and assigns certain diagnoses to ten predefined infectious disease “syndromes” of greatest concern. The software also maps the outpatient diagnoses against the current Tri-Service Reportable Medical Events list, allowing local staff to investigate these events promptly. The new version of ESSENCE provides role-based access to patient identifying information, facilitating local public health work. Also, automated e-mail and mobile phone alerts of possible disease outbreaks are now available.

ESSENCE is an essential component of military installation protection. The Services must have appropriately trained public health or preventive medicine professionals monitoring ESSENCE at each military installation. There must be at least one primary user and one alternate user with protected health information ESSENCE accounts for each military installation within 45 days. Installations without qualified monitors should make arrangements with a nearby installation or their Service-specific Public Health Center (USACHPPM, NEHC, AFIOH, or CG-1121) to provide coverage. These individuals will routinely monitor ESSENCE alerts and associated graphs and data tables for any military treatment facility within their direct jurisdiction as well as other nearby military installations.

Monitoring frequency should be at least once each routine work day, but should increase to include weekends and holidays during periods of increased threat, e.g., specific local terrorist threat, WHO/national pandemic influenza alert phase 5 or 6, etc. There must be active communication between the ESSENCE monitors and the local Public Health Emergency Officer (DoDD 6200.3). For those installations with Project Guardian (chem/bio agent sensor devices) or that are in metropolitan areas where BioWatch sensors are deployed, it will be important to coordinate closely on all preliminary positive results to monitor for evidence of human disease cases to support, or refute, the sensor result. Additionally, the installation medical professionals responsible for public health must maintain a strong relationship with the local civilian public health office, advising them of potential outbreaks and forwarding reportable medical events information as required by local, county, or state law. It is important to realize that DoD shares de-identified outpatient medical data with CDC for use in their BioSense system (analogous to ESSENCE). There may be times when BioSense analysts will contact the installation directly seeking information about potential outbreaks or sentinel events.