

IOWA

Keeping Track, Promoting Health



"CDC's National Environmental Public Health Tracking Network is the most important accomplishment of the past decade."

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For decades, the United States has faced a fundamental gap in understanding how environmental contaminants affect people's health. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is working to close this gap by improving surveillance through the National Environmental Public Health Tracking Network (Tracking Network). The Tracking Network is a dynamic Web-based tool that, for the first time, provides health and environment data in one easy to find location.

Policy makers and public health officials can use the Tracking Network to make critical decisions about where to target environmental public health resources and interventions. Health practitioners and researchers can use the Tracking Network to learn more about health conditions related to the environment, and improve treatment plans. Anyone can use the Tracking Network to find out how the environment may be affecting them, their family's or community's health.

The building blocks of the national network are state and local health departments around the country that are funded to build local tracking systems. These systems supply data to the National Tracking Network and address local environmental public health concerns. The tracking programs use their networks every day to improve the health of their communities.

Why Tracking Matters in Iowa

Iowa has diverse environmental public health concerns. Some of the state's most pressing concerns are childhood lead poisonings, pesticides in private wells, and the health effects of being exposed to nitrates in drinking water. The Iowa Environmental Public Health Tracking Program (Iowa Tracking Program) will help the state address these and other issues.

In 2008, an assessment of Iowa public health standards was conducted at the Iowa Department of Public Health (IDPH). The standards described the basic public health services and infrastructures that all Iowans can expect from their local and state public health departments. The assessment emphasized the need for an Iowa tracking program, and recommendations included the development of a Web-based data system for all programs.

In 2010, the IDPH began receiving funding from CDC to develop the Iowa Tracking Program. Participating in CDC's National Environmental Public Health Tracking Program will allow Iowa to provide data that will help its citizens better understand the relationships between health and the environment.



TRACKING IN ACTION

	The Problem	Tracking in Action	Improved Public Health
<p>Linking lead exposure to risk factors</p>	<p>Childhood exposure to lead is a concern because it can cause developmental disabilities. Iowa has elevated child blood lead levels (BLLs) above the national average. Data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention show that between 2003 and 2007 more than 4,700 Iowa children had blood lead levels that were 10 micrograms per deciliter (µg/dl) or higher.</p>	<p>The Iowa Tracking Program will work with the state's Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program to conduct a data-linkage project. The project will study the links between childhood blood lead levels and risk factors such as poverty level, race, ethnicity, and age of housing.</p>	<p>Knowing what risk factors are related to childhood lead poisoning will help the Iowa Department of Public Health and others deliver resources and interventions to the citizens who are most at risk. This will help Iowa lower the number of children with elevated blood lead levels in the state.</p>
<p>Improving surveillance for pesticides in private water wells</p>	<p>Contact with pesticides may be related to a variety of acute and chronic health problems. Private water wells have the potential to be contaminated with pesticides, especially in farming areas. About 15% of Iowans use private wells for drinking water. Little is known about the extent of human pesticide exposure from private well water.</p>	<p>To improve the state's ability to measure pesticide exposure, the Iowa Tracking Program will work with the State Hygienic Laboratory and the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship to map off-label pesticide use, pesticide sales, pesticide application statistics, and private well contamination data.</p>	<p>Being able to identify areas with high pesticide use will help Iowa monitor those areas for health problems that are related to using pesticides. This may also help the Iowa Department of Public Health determine if education and intervention programs are needed or if new regulations or guidelines are needed for monitoring drinking wells.</p>
<p>Understanding the relationships between nitrates and cancer</p>	<p>Nitrate contamination of drinking water often is found in farming areas, usually from fertilizer runoff and human and animal waste. Some studies in Iowa have suggested a link between nitrate exposure and cancer.</p>	<p>The Iowa Tracking Program will make private and public water supply data and cancer data available to explore possible links between nitrates in drinking water and cancer.</p>	<p>Being able to link water and cancer data may help show associations between health effects data and nitrate contamination data. Further scientific evidence will help to create nitrate management policies and public education materials.</p>