

# NEW YORK CITY

*Keeping Track, Promoting Health*



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 New York City

One of New York City's (NYC) environmental public health tracking priorities is identifying hazards and exposures associated with the urban environment. NYC's Environmental Public Health Tracking Network has compiled a variety of data sources to better understand urban exposures to environmental contaminants and health outcomes related to those exposures. These include data on the built environment, public health inspectional activities and findings, exposures to pesticides, individual and commercial pesticide use, and exposures to carbon monoxide, outdoor air pollutants, heavy metals, and second-hand smoke. NYC has used these data to evaluate and redesign program activities, to design studies to assess exposures to environmental contaminants, to develop policies, and to share information.

The New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene has been part of the National Environmental Public Health Tracking Program since 2002. As part of the program, NYC collects, examines, and provides environmental health data for policymakers, elected officials, agency partners, health care providers, and the public. In 2009, NYC launched its own Environmental Public Health Tracking Network. Going forward, NYC plans to update the state network to reflect ongoing and emerging public environmental health issues.

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

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# TRACKING IN ACTION

	The Problem	Tracking in Action	Improved Public Health
<p><b>Informing health care providers about asthma</b></p>	<p>Each fall NYC sees a large increase in hospital stays and in emergency department visits for asthma, especially among children. Illness rates in the fall can be three times higher than rates during the summer. Possible reasons include infections among children returning to school, seasonal pollen, and cooler weather.</p>	<p>The NYC Tracking Program analyzed childhood asthma data. It used the results to write messages for health care providers. The messages—were sent through the city’s Health Alert Network—and urged providers to update patients’ asthma management plans in time for school year start.</p>	<p>In the last few years, the seasonal fall mailing to health care providers and other asthma prevention activities have coincided with a decrease in rates of NYC hospital stays among children.</p> <p>Because of the program’s success, advisories to health care providers have become a standard practice at the beginning of each school year in NYC.</p>
<p><b>Guiding policy on pesticide use</b></p>	<p>Every year the media reports on fires and explosions triggered by indoor pesticide foggers, also known as “bug bombs.” Yet little information is available about the type and number of bug bomb-related injuries and health effects.</p>	<p>The NYC Tracking Program studied short-term bug bomb related health effects and injuries. After reviewing available national and local data, the NYC Tracking Program and partners published the results. The report included many kinds of bug bomb injuries and illnesses: severe irritation of the eyes and throat, nausea, and shortness of breath. In NYC, people using bug bombs in large, multi-unit apartment buildings without telling their neighbors caused many of these events.</p> <p>NYC Tracking Program studies showed that people living in low-income neighborhoods are more likely to use bug bombs and sprays rather than safer choices like bait stations or gels.</p>	<p>This information led the health department, in conjunction with the NY State Department of Environmental Conservation, to pursue restricting bug bomb use by the public. In New York, these devices would only be available for purchase and use by licensed pest control professionals. NYC has also encouraged the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to restrict nationwide the use of total-release foggers.</p>
<p><b>Improving public health responses to climate change</b></p>	<p>On average, heat waves cause more deaths than other natural disasters in the United States. Because of climate change, heat waves are likely to get worse and happen more often. Public health guidance for heat wave response will require better information on how summertime heat relates to health.</p>	<p>NYC Tracking Program staff analyzed the number of illnesses and deaths related to NYC weather. They also looked at individual and neighborhood factors such as poverty and the proportion of seniors without access to air conditioning. NYC tracking staff found that their heat advisories needed to include information on cooler, but still potentially dangerous heat waves.</p>	<p>Following the lead of the tracking program, NYC government has taken several actions to protect public health during heat waves. One example is an agreement with the City’s Office of Emergency Management and the National Weather Service to revise definitions for heat advisories and for emergency response.</p>