CDC's National Environmental Public Health Tracking Network

CALIFORNIA

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 California

California is the nation's most populous state, and its diverse industries and agricultures have significant effects on the environment. California spends an estimated $75 to $90 billion annually on health care costs that are related to treating chronic diseases. An estimated $10 billion per year, or $288 per person, is spent in California on treating environmentally related diseases, including childhood asthma, cancer, and lead poisoning*.

California has been part of the CDC's National Environmental Public Health Tracking Program since 2002. The state began building the California Environmental Public Health Tracking Network (California Tracking Network) in 2006 because of the urgent need for a centralized source of information on environmental-related health data. Launched in 2009, the California Tracking Network improves existing programs that prevent pollution and disease, helps target resources more efficiently to those areas that need it most, and helps researchers, public health authorities, healthcare practitioners, and the public better understand the possible associations between the environment and adverse health effects.

National Center for Environmental Health
Division of Environmental Hazards and Health Effects

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TRACKING IN ACTION

	The Problem	Tracking in Action	Improved Public Health
Identifying the increases in preterm birth rates in Fresno County, California	Research shows that preterm birth is associated with the mother's exposure to traffic pollutants and lead. A routine review of data on the California Tracking Network revealed a pattern in the risk of preterm birth in Fresno County, one of the major population centers in the state's Central Valley area.	California's Tracking Program informed the Fresno Department of Public Health of the trends. The local health department asked the tracking network for more data about • Preterm birth trends reported by race and ethnicity. • Maternal Infant Health (MIH) indicators, including very preterm birth (less than 32 weeks gestation). • Rates by census tracts.	Fresno County used the information to identify locations for targeting activities that are related to childhood lead poisoning, air quality, and asthma. Fresno County officials reported that the data and assistance from the tracking network were very helpful to the local childhood lead poisoning prevention program.
Using a traffic tool in San Francisco city planning	The San Francisco Planning Department needed a way to decide when to refer project sponsors or developers to the San Francisco Department of Public Health. The health department assesses the risk associated with exposure to roadway-related air pollutants, such as ozone, particulate matter, and nitrogen dioxide. These air pollutants can be triggers for asthma.	The California Tracking Program developed a traffic tool that the Planning Department used as a screening instrument. The tool helped the Planning Department determine how close high-traffic roads were to a proposed project development. When residential or other sensitive uses such as a community space are proposed for sites within 500 feet of roads that more than 100,000 cars travel on daily, the Planning Department is required to perform a risk assessment to fully understand the potential effects of the project before approving it.	Local stakeholders used the California Tracking Program's traffic tool to identify and prevent potentially harmful environmental risks in city planning.
Improving community access to useful information	Variations in health status most frequently occur at the community level, but health information often is available only at the county level. The challenge is how to use existing data to increase the public's knowledge about how the environment affects their community's health, without compromising individual privacy. The affected communities should be able to gain access to this information.	The California Tracking Network used special analytic and mapping techniques to locate areas in Alameda County with • High rates of preterm birth. • High rates of full term births with low birth weight. • A range of asthma indicators. The staff explored possible relationships between these outcomes and environmental hazards. The project demonstrated how the California Tracking Network can identify elevated rates of community health outcomes while maintaining individual confidentiality. The California Tracking Network also identified disparities in rates by race and ethnicity, income, and geography.	The California Tracking Program partnered with the Urban Strategies Council and several other organizations in a community collaborative called InfoAlameda-County (www.infoalamedacounty.org). The collaboration aimed to make these data available publicly and to provide technical assistance to promote equity and empowerment for low-income neighborhoods and communities of color in Alameda County. The information generated by the tracking network was incorporated into the InfoAlamedaCounty.org interactive mapping Web site so that community residents could continue to access the data even after the project ended. **Strategies for Establishing an Environmental Health Surveillance System in California: A Report of the SB 702 Expert Working Group. California Policy Research Center. http://www.catracking.com/resources/ewg/sb702report/EHSSrpt.pdf*

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National Environmental Public Health Tracking Network
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California Environmental Public Health Tracking Program
http://www.cehtp.org