

KANSAS

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 Kansas

Each year, the Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE) receives hundreds of inquiries from the media, community organizations, researchers, and members of the public about perceived or possible health threats from the environment. In 2009, KDHE began receiving funding from CDC to plan for a statewide tracking network that will be part of the National Tracking Network. The Kansas Environmental Public Health Tracking Network (Kansas Tracking Network) will benefit Kansans by offering improved surveillance and faster responses to environmental public health questions and actions. The goal of the Kansas Tracking Network is to prevent health problems such as childhood lead poisoning and cancer that may be associated with exposures to environmental contaminants.



TRACKING IN ACTION

	The Problem	Tracking in Action	Improved Public Health
<p>Mapping childhood lead poisoning data</p>	<p>Lead is a heavy metal toxin that is commonly found in our environment. Lead affects the health of many, especially children. The most common cause of childhood lead poisoning is the deterioration of lead-based paint surfaces in homes. Nearly 70% of homes in Kansas are at risk due to the use of lead-based paints. Blood lead levels (BLLs) as low as 5 micrograms per deciliter (ug/dL) are associated with harmful effects on children's learning and behavior. In Kansas, a child is considered poisoned with a BLL of 10 ug/dL. Hundreds of children are poisoned by lead in Kansas each year. However, many children in the state are not screened for lead.</p>	<p>The Kansas Tracking Program will partner with KDHE's Healthy Homes Program to evaluate data from the childhood blood lead program. Through mapping, the Kansas Tracking Program will be able to illustrate the areas of the state where BLLs are high and a large number of older homes are located.</p>	<p>Using the evaluation, the Kansas Tracking Program will be able to define objectively the scope of both childhood blood lead screening and childhood blood lead poisoning. This will provide valuable information to public health professionals to conduct targeted health outreach. The goal is to increase the number of children that are screened for lead in their blood and decrease the number of children with blood lead poisoning.</p>
<p>Decreasing cancer cluster response time</p>	<p>Cancer is the second leading cause of death in Kansas. In 2008, 5,286 residents died from cancer, and each year an average of 12,990 new cancer cases are diagnosed. Cancer directly or indirectly affects many Kansans. KDHE receives an average of eight inquiries about potential cancer clusters each year. Each intensive investigation requires weeks to months to complete.</p>	<p>The Kansas Tracking Program will partner with the Kansas Cancer Registry to develop methods that use tracking data to decrease the time needed to respond to cancer cluster inquiries. The program will also create maps and other tools to enhance communication to stakeholders.</p>	<p>The cancer data provided on the Kansas Tracking Network, along with the methods developed with the Kansas Cancer Registry, will increase the ability of public health professionals to investigate potential links between chronic diseases, such as cancer, and potential environmental health hazards.</p>
<p>Partnering with Kansas Radon Program</p>	<p>Radon is the leading cause of lung cancer in non-smokers and the second leading cause of lung cancer overall. It is estimated that as many as 200 cases of lung cancer per year may be related to prolonged radon exposure in Kansans. Radon typically moves from the ground under and around a home through cracks and other holes in the foundation. The Kansas Radon Program's database of tests has more than 47,000 measurements, and 40% of them are at or above the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's action level.</p>	<p>The Kansas Tracking Program will assist the Kansas Radon Program to analyze data and discover trends that indicate increased risk to public health. The results of this analysis will be made available to all citizens through the Kansas Tracking Network.</p>	<p>This information will increase public awareness of radon. It will also allow public health officials and the public to make informed decisions and take action to prevent exposure and reduce the risks associated with elevated radon levels.</p>