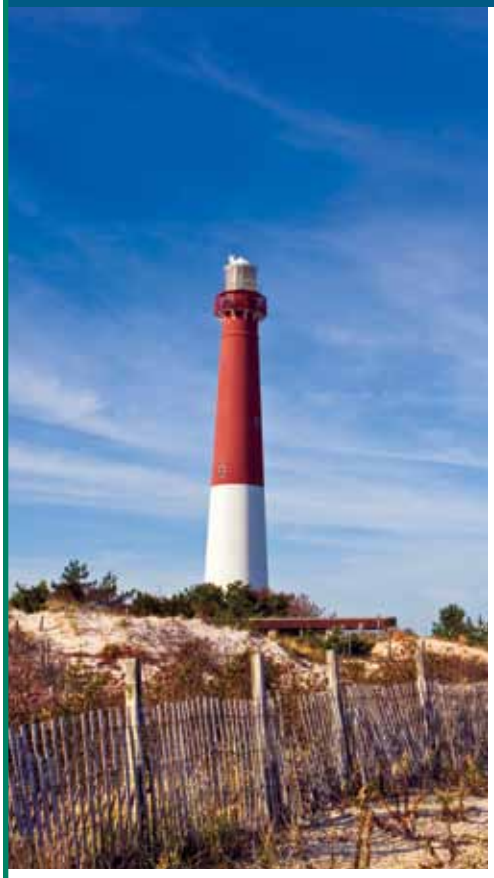
CDC's National Environmental Public Health Tracking Network

NEW JERSEY

Keeping Track, Promoting Health



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

Thomas A. Burke, Ph.D., M.P.H.

Associate Dean for Public Health Practice and Training
Professor, Department of Health Policy and Management
Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public 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 Jersey

New Jersey citizens are concerned with pollution contaminating air and drinking water in their state. They also worry whether asthma, cancer, birth defects, and other illnesses and diseases are occurring too often in their communities. To meet these concerns, the New Jersey Environmental Public Health Tracking Network (New Jersey Tracking Network) provides a gateway for environmental public health information. The New Jersey Tracking Network informs concerned citizens, state and local government officials, health and environmental advocacy organizations, community organizations, and researchers about illnesses and diseases in the state.

The New Jersey Tracking Network is integrated with the New Jersey State Health Assessment Data (NJ SHAD) system. This integration allows New Jersey citizens to get public health tracking information and other health and environmental information such as immunization, chronic and infectious diseases, smoking, and obesity rates on a single Web site. Anyone can easily use NJ SHAD to see if asthma, cancer, childhood lead poisoning, air pollution, and water contamination rates are higher in their county than in neighboring counties.

New Jersey has been part of CDC's national Tracking Program since 2003. The state started building the New Jersey Tracking Network in 2006. Since its launch in 2008, the New Jersey Tracking Network has featured easy-to-read graphs, charts, maps, and data on environmental public health issues to New Jersey residents and policymakers. New Jersey Tracking enhances collaboration between New Jersey agencies and programs that are now sharing data and pooling resources to work together to address health and environmental problems.

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

CS225774_T

TRACKING IN ACTION

	The Problem	Tracking in Action	Improved Public Health
Helping to reduce the number of children that are exposed to lead	Childhood lead poisoning is a problem in New Jersey, mainly because of exposure to lead-based paint. Before 1950, indoor paint had high levels of lead. In New Jersey, about 30% of housing was built before 1950. In several counties, 40–50% of the housing was built before 1950. These homes pose the highest risks for exposure to lead-based paints.	Through a partnership with the New Jersey Tracking Network, the New Jersey Child and Adolescent Health Program now conducts more sophisticated data analyses than were previously available. Geocoding and mapping of childhood lead datasets has become routine. Childhood lead poisoning rates are now available by county, municipality, year of birth, and calendar year of lead testing. This has helped public health officials target resources where they are most needed.	The number of New Jersey children under age 17 who have been reported with childhood lead poisoning (greater or equal to 10 ug/dL) has decreased from 4,048 in 2005 to 1,358 in 2010. This is a 66% decrease. In the future, the New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services (NJDHSS) will begin to look at the distribution of blood lead levels below 10 ug/dL. This will help to continue the decrease in lead exposure among New Jersey's children.
Improving the ability to share environmental information between state agencies	Creating environmental datasets for public health purposes and sharing them between state agencies can be expensive, difficult, and slow. The New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) wanted a secure and easy way to share numerous environmental datasets with the New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services (NJDHSS) on an ongoing basis.	NJDEP Tracking partners worked with other Tracking states and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) to design and build improvements to an existing national environmental network. The National Environmental Information Exchange Network (EN) fit their needs. EN enhancements have now made the environmental datasets more useful for public health tracking. They have expanded the information available for tracking use. These improvements allow Tracking partners in all states to share meaningful environmental data between state agencies, which was difficult to do previously.	The New Jersey Tracking Program now uses the EN to obtain environmental datasets. NJSHAD now analyzes and publishes these as drinking water and air quality indicators. Because of New Jersey's leadership, interagency environmental data sharing improved not only in New Jersey, but in all Tracking states. U.S. EPA is now working to make the expanded EN air monitoring and drinking water data exchange the national standard for state environmental protection agencies.
Providing information on disease rates to advocacy organizations, health planners, health care providers, and governmental agencies	Organizations and agencies have ongoing needs for accurate timely health outcome data for the regions and populations they serve. It can be difficult to find and obtain health related data, especially data for a particular community.	NJSHAD has become a one-stop New Jersey public health resource. Advocates for Children of New Jersey said, "we use SHAD Query to get a lot of the health related data we need, such as statistics on low infant birth weight and infant mortality. SHAD is self explanatory, and has both county and municipal level data, and you can get data by race and age-group." A consultant to New Jersey's Federally Qualified Health Centers said, "when you need to make a compelling case to document unmet needs, the data is specific and available. That can be important in a place like New Jersey, where there are huge health disparities by race, ethnicity, or education level."	NJ SHAD data has already made a difference. When Advocates for Children of New Jersey published NJ SHAD data as part of their annual *NJ Kids Count 2010 County Profile Rankings*, a low ranked county in southern New Jersey was surprised by some of their numbers. The county has responded by creating a workgroup to track and improve their county's health statistics. As stated by Advocates for Children of New Jersey, "when numbers are put in a book, you can't ignore them."

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
1600 Clifton Road, Atlanta, Georgia 30333, U.S.A.
Tel: (404) 639-3311
Public Inquiries: (404) 639-3534 • (800) 311-3435
www.cdc.gov

National Environmental Public Health Tracking Network
www.cdc.gov/ephtracking

New Jersey Environmental Public Health Tracking Program
http://www.nj.gov/health/epht/