

# VERMONT

*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 Vermont

Vermont has a reputation for having a healthy environment, but the state is not immune to hazards that threaten public health. Every year, the Vermont Department of Health handles hundreds of inquiries from the media, community organizations, researchers, and individuals about possible health threats from environmental exposures such as air pollution and drinking water contaminants. The health department began receiving funding in 2009 to build a statewide tracking network that will send data to CDC's National Tracking Network. Local, state, regional, and national data will be available through the Vermont Tracking Network. This data will help Vermonters better understand the relationship between their environment and their health.



## TRACKING IN ACTION

	The Problem	Tracking in Action	Improved Public Health
<p><b>Understanding the geography of asthma</b></p>	<p>Asthma affects about 11% of adults and 10% of children in Vermont. Some areas of the state have higher rates of hospital stays and emergency room visits due to asthma, but the reasons remain unknown. Rutland County has the highest hospital stays rate of all Vermont counties. The Department of Environmental Conservation's air monitoring data show that this county also has the most days per year of air pollution from fine particulate matter.</p>	<p>Differences in hospitalization rates between geographic areas may result from local population characteristics. They also may be caused by local environmental exposures to fine particulate matter and ozone pollution or mold and allergens in older housing. The Vermont Tracking Program will partner with the department of health's CDC-funded Asthma Program to use tracking data to identify trends and patterns in asthma hospitalizations and emergency department visits. Better understanding of asthma triggers could lead to better ways to prevent asthma.</p>	<p>The Vermont Tracking Program plans to use this information to determine the most appropriate public health actions. These actions will lead to fewer hospitalizations and emergency department visits due to asthma.</p>
<p><b>Tracking fluoride in drinking water</b></p>	<p>In Vermont, most people use drinking water from public systems that contain fluoride. Fluoride also occurs naturally in some areas of the state at levels below, equal to or higher than the safe levels set by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Studies have consistently shown that water with fluoride helps to prevent tooth decay. However, some communities question the need for fluoride in their water systems.</p>	<p>The Vermont Tracking Program will study insurance claims made for dental cavities, and compare those claims in towns served by public water systems with fluoride and towns with systems that do not have fluoride in the water. Data from private drinking wells will also be considered.</p>	<p>The Vermont Tracking Program plans to use the results of this project to make recommendations to local water systems about using fluoride in public drinking water systems.</p>
<p><b>Improving cross-border public health investigations</b></p>	<p>The New England states occupy a small area, and complex environmental issues and public health events often cross borders. One example of this is the tritium contaminated groundwater at Vermont Yankee Nuclear Power Station, which borders Massachusetts and New Hampshire. Coordination and data-sharing among public health, environmental, agriculture and emergency management agencies in-state and with bordering states was required to analyze risk and monitor the investigation and remediation.</p>	<p>Sharing data across borders will help Vermont and neighboring states better analyze, interpret, and respond to public health hazards.</p>	<p>The Vermont Tracking Program will make data sharing easier both within the state and with neighboring states. It will also improve response time to public inquiries and help public health professionals use the best resources for public health actions.</p>