

FLORIDA

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 Florida

Florida is the fourth-most populous state in the nation. It remains one of the nation's fastest growing states because of the number of people moving here and a high birth rate. Florida's population has the potential to be exposed to environmental hazards year round. One area of concern is the possible association between environmental contamination and birth defects. Birth defects are the leading cause of infant mortality in Florida. Also, public awareness of emerging environmental hazards is increasing, which raises public concern about chronic health issues like cancer. At the beginning of the new century, 88% of Florida registered voters supported a Nationwide Health Tracking Network for chronic diseases (Princeton Survey Research Associates, May 2000).

Since 2003, Florida has been part of CDC's Tracking Program. Florida began building its network in 2006. Since the network's 2009 launch the Florida Tracking Program has focused on these goals:

- Improve and standardize health surveillance programs' format, content, and measures
- Improve resolution of routinely collected environmental information like air quality
- Promote standardization of reporting formats and public access tools



TRACKING IN ACTION

	The Problem	Tracking in Action	Improved Public Health
<p>Birth defects monitoring system</p>	<p>Birth defects are a major cause of death and disease in Florida's children. Birth defects can also contribute substantially to long-term disability. In 2007, more than 9,000 Florida infants were born with major structural or genetic birth defects. The causes of most birth defects are unknown. The possible association between birth defects and environmental contamination is a real concern in Florida.</p>	<p>The Florida Tracking Program, Florida Birth Defects Registry, and the University of South Florida developed a surveillance system to improve identifying cases and confirming diagnoses for the 12 birth defects in the Florida Tracking Network:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Anencephaly 2. Spina Bifida without anencephaly 3. Hypoplastic left heart syndrome 4. Teratology of Fallot 5. Transposition of the great vessels 6. Cleft lip with cleft palate 7. Cleft lip without cleft palate 8. Cleft palate without cleft lip 9. Hypospadias 10. Gastroschisis 11. Reduction deformities of the upper/lower limbs 12. Down Syndrome 	<p>The Florida Tracking Program Active Surveillance Project has developed an improved system for monitoring birth defects. This system has helped identify higher rates of serious birth defects of the brain and spine in Puerto Rican women in Florida. These data will assist in developing prevention activities to educate these women about the health benefits of folic acid, a B vitamin that can help prevent such defects.</p> <p>The Florida Birth Defects Registry also uses birth defect data collected through enhanced surveillance to develop county risk profiles for selected conditions.</p>
<p>Asthma and Outdoor Air Quality</p>	<p>Asthma is an ongoing public health concern in Florida. In 2006, more than 27,000 Florida hospital stays were due to asthma. The average asthma hospital patient was 42 years old, with an average stay of three days.</p>	<p>The Florida Tracking Program linked Florida Department of Environmental Protection outdoor air quality data with Agency for Health Care Administration asthma hospital data. Tracking staff developed county-level maps showing the prevalence of asthma across the state. Tracking staff found that during certain times of the year, the link increased between asthma rates and outdoor air quality. That said, only more work will provide a complete picture of Florida's asthma problem.</p>	<p>The Tracking Program used this project as an opportunity to improve agency teamwork and surveillance ability. The Program works with the University of Florida and NASA to assess the effects of wildfires on asthma hospital stays. The hypothesis is that asthma hospital visits increase during years in which wildfires are endemic. During such events, timely wildfire notices and air quality messages may reduce the asthma burden. And the ultimate objective, pursued jointly with Florida's new Asthma Control Program, is to reduce the state's asthma burden.</p>
<p>Consuming fish safely: Mercury biomonitoring project</p>	<p>Mercury is a toxin that occurs in the environment naturally and as a result of industrial pollution. Methylmercury is a form of mercury found in some fish and shellfish. It poses a risk to people who consume certain types of fish and shellfish. The greatest risk is to women of childbearing age and to children, who should not eat certain types of fish. Mercury can damage the nervous system of young children and developing fetuses.</p> <p>Human exposure to mercury through fish consumption is a growing concern in the United States. Areas with high mercury emissions from coal-fired power plants and that have populations who frequently consume fish are of most concern. To help people eat the proper amount and species, they need accurate information about how much and what types of fish to consume.</p>	<p>Researchers evaluated fish eating patterns among women of child-bearing age in Duval and Martin Counties, their research also included mercury biomonitoring. Participants completed a survey about their fish eating habits, knowledge of fish consumption advisories, pregnancy status, demographic and socio-economic information, and mercury exposure history. And each participant provided a scalp hair sample for mercury analysis.</p> <p>Results showed that women of child-bearing age in Duval and Martin Counties consume more fish than their counterparts in other areas of the United States and that their hair-mercury levels are higher than the participants of the study who do not consume fish. Because of the low local awareness of fish advisories, increased education is needed about the advisories and about mercury exposure among at-risk populations in Duval and Martin Counties.</p>	<p>The Florida Tracking Program created the Fish for Your Health Wallet Card. It contains information about what types and amounts of fish to eat. It encourages women to enjoy the health benefits of certain kinds of fish but also avoid unsafe amounts of mercury. The card lists</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Species of fish by different categories of mercury content, and • Suggested amounts of fish to eat each week. <p>The Florida Tracking Program distributes the wallet cards to county health departments, state fish markets and grocery stores, and to the Florida Medical Association (FMA). The FMA sends the wallet cards to local branches and to physicians' offices.</p>