

# **Somerset County Emergency Operations Plan**

## **ATTACHMENT J - DISEASE AND EPIDEMICS**

### **I. NATURE OF THE HAZARD**

Disease is the condition of an organism that impairs physiological functioning, resulting from causes such as infection, genetic defect or environmental stress. An epidemic is a widespread outbreak of an infectious disease where many people are infected at the same time.

Epidemics occur when an infectious disease spreads beyond a local population, lasting longer and reaching people in a wider geographical area. The extent of an epidemic will be determined by the ease with which a microbe moves from person to person and the behavior of individuals and societies.

When people are exposed to a pathogen such as pneumonic plague, anthrax or smallpox, they may not know that they have been exposed, and those who are infected, or subsequently become infected, may not feel sick for some time. This delay between exposure and onset of illness, the incubation period, is characteristic of infectious diseases. The incubation period may range from several hours to a few weeks, depending on the exposure and pathogen. Although not rated and profiled as a hazard, disease and epidemics are discussed in this attachment of the Basic Plan.

### **II. RISK AREAS**

An epidemic is not constrained by geography. Any location in the United States is susceptible and locations of those individuals shown to be infected could be in many different places at simultaneously. Some factors that will determine the risk factor for individuals will be those exposed to the pathogen, the level and duration of the exposure, the sanitary conditions, and the health, cleanliness and biological resistance of the individual.

### **III. DIRECTION AND CONTROL**

Due to the scope of a epidemic and the skill level of Somerset County and municipal emergency managers and responders, such an event will not be directed and controlled by the County or municipal officials. Local hospitals, clinics, and medical practitioners will be the "emergency responders" for an epidemic. The lead State Agency will be the Department of Human Services, Bureau of Health. Guidance and direction as to what may be accomplished by Somerset County will be directed from the Bureau of Health and the State EOC.

### **IV. COMMUNICATIONS**

In the event of an epidemic situation, regular communication must be maintained between the Somerset County EOC, the local hospitals, and the municipal EOCs. The primary method of maintaining contact will be by telephone. Use of the Internet will be maximized in order to transfer the maximum amount of information to the greatest number of people. Use of the Internet will also reduce the time spent on landline and cellular phones and will reduce the spread of contagious pathogens during meetings.

### **V. WARNING**

Initial detection of an epidemic will most likely come from local medical facilities around the State. The State of Maine is developing methods to coordinate and analyze possible disease outbreaks through the recognition of similar symptoms or syndromes by clinicians in hospital or

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clinical settings around the state.

### VI. EMERGENCY PUBLIC INFORMATION

The release of Public Information during an epidemic will be handled by the State Bureau of Health, with support from regional hospitals.

The Somerset County EOC may be used to help disseminate public information in terms of protective actions the public may take.

### VII. HEALTH AND MEDICAL

Local hospitals and EMS personnel should anticipate the need to handle large numbers of people who may or may not be contaminated but who are fearful about their medical well-being.

The Somerset County Sheriff's Office and municipal Health Officers may be used to investigate or enforce quarantines established by the State Bureau of Health. The State Statutes of Title 22: Health and Welfare, listed in Attachment G, may be consulted.

An epidemic event will be completely out of the response and recovery capabilities of Somerset County. It will most likely be or rapidly become a State-wide event. As such, the Somerset County EOC will immediately request health and medical resources from the State EOC and coordinate information and efforts between the municipalities, local medical facilities, and the State agencies involved.

### X. RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Maine Department of Human Services' Bureau of Health - responsible for responding to a epidemic through:

1. Investigation: provide public health expertise (from epidemiology, medicine, veterinary medicine, laboratory toxicology and health engineering) required to determine likely cause.
2. Consultation: provide public health recommendations (from epidemiology, medicine, veterinary medicine, laboratory, toxicology and health engineering) for the management of the epidemic on both the population and individual patient level.
3. Communication: provide the means to deliver urgent health alerts and medical advisories to appropriate members of the medical community using blastfax, email and secure website and to assist emergency management officials in developing needed health advisories and educational messages for the general public
4. Pharmaceutical Stockpile Administration: planning for and coordination of the distribution of pharmaceuticals and supplies from the CDC stockpile.

The Bureau of Health is located in Augusta at 1-800 821-5821.