The Florida Lab Link

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THE 2014 FLORIDA CHEMICAL EXPOSURE EVENT FULL SCALE EXERCISE

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The 2014 Florida Chemical Exposure Event Full Scale Exercise was conducted February 17-21, 2014. The exercise was hosted by the Florida Department of Health Bureau of Public Health Laboratories (DOH BPHL) Chemical Threat Program and was an opportunity for multiple agencies throughout Florida to work together to prepare for effective responses to a chemical exposure event.

Participants in the exercise included representatives from DOH BPHL, DOH Bureau of Preparedness and Response, DOH county health departments, the Florida Fusion Center in Tallahassee, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Florida Highway Patrol, and Florida Department of Law Enforcement. An impressive 29 hospitals took part in the exercise, with representatives from each actively participating in all planning meetings and several side meetings. Representatives from several agencies also discussed their roles and communication requirements during a chemical exposure event. The participant counties are displayed in Figure 1.

The exercise scenario simulated exposure to the organophosphorous nerve agent, sarin, to individuals shopping at malls and shopping centers throughout Florida. Retailers opened early to long lines and record numbers of shoppers after advertising the 2014 Presidents' Day sale as the largest sales event in Presidents' Day history. By mid-morning, many shoppers fell ill and presented to local hospitals with an array of symptoms that included rapid breathing, runny nose, watery eyes, drooling, nausea, diarrhea, convulsions, loss of consciousness, and respiratory failure. Reports followed that some first responders began exhibiting symptoms after treating victims. This scenario was incorporated into the Master Scenario Events List (MSEL), which is a systematic listing of the exercise events. The MSEL is a guide used by participants during exercise play.

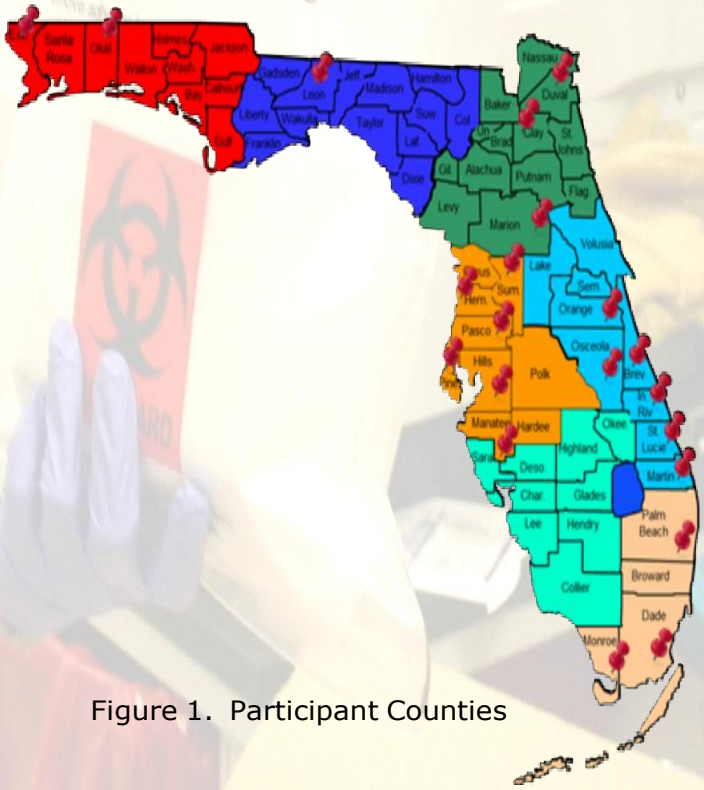

Figure 1. Participant Counties

Twenty-seven of the 29 hospitals participated in the specimen packaging and shipping portion of the exercise. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) provided ten specimens spiked with sarin metabolites to each hospital for this portion of the exercise. Hospital laboratories then packed and shipped these specimens on the first day of exercise to their regional chemical threat coordinators. The chemical threat coordinators evaluated each package to ensure the methods used were in accordance with International Air Transport Association (IATA) and CDC protocol, which dictates that specimens collected during a chemical terrorism event are evidentiary. Therefore, in addition to adhering to the protocol for shipping biological and infectious substances, each laboratory was required to ship specimens secured with two layers of evidence tape and establish a chain-of-custody for documentation of specimen handling.

The Florida DOH BPHL- Jacksonville Level 1 Laboratory Response Network-Chemical Threat laboratory (LRN-C) analyzed all specimens for sarin metabolites to evaluate the laboratory's analytical surge capacity and results reporting process. The laboratory received specimens from a local hospital the first day of the exercise. Analyses began on the second day with the receipt of specimens from seventeen laboratories in the Miami and Jacksonville regions (Figure 2). Tampa and Pensacola chemical threat coordinators packed and shipped specimens received from their regional hospitals on day two. Analyses and results reporting continued through Friday, the fifth and final day of the exercise. The Jacksonville Level 1 chemical threat laboratory also had the pleasure of hosting a CDC employee (Figure 3), who actively participated by observing and evaluating on days one through four. All exercise activities allowed the Chemical Threat Program to successfully measure and validate the selected target capabilities of information sharing and public health laboratory testing.

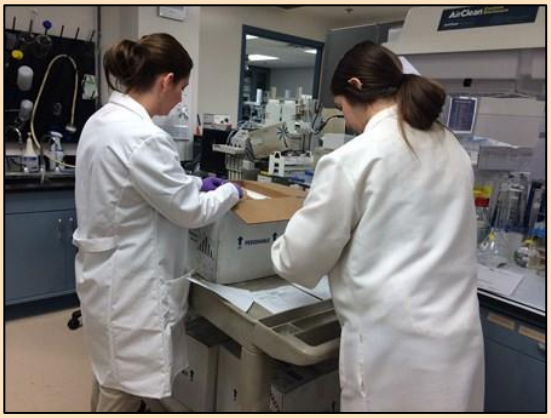

Figure 2

Figure 3

The 2014 Florida Chemical Exposure Event Full Scale Exercise encouraged "spin-off" exercises and training opportunities as several participating hospitals elected to evaluate their decontamination protocols. For these hospitals, participation extended beyond employees to community volunteers, who participated in roles that included patients and Amateur Radio (Ham) operators.

Thirteen of the 29 hospitals in the Jacksonville, Tampa, and Miami regions collaborated with the Florida Poison Information Center by reporting symptoms from several "paper patients" via the toll free number. Poison information toxicologists were able to evaluate the symptoms and provided relative feedback concerning patient exposure. This enabled the Florida Poison Information Center to enter and monitor case data and monitor their staff's ability to respond to a chemical event. Chemical threat coordinators provided chemical terrorism awareness and collecting clinical specimens after a chemical terrorism event training to hospital employees and community volunteers across the state. Each licensed participant received two continuing education units (CEUs) credits.

Feedback indicated the exercise was indeed a learning experience. Participants report they are now more aware of the scope of involvement and agency interaction when responding and possible issues that may occur during a chemical exposure event. Special thanks to all participants who helped make this exercise a success. Exercises are indeed invaluable tools for disaster preparedness and for helping fulfill the Florida Department of Health's mission *"to protect, promote, and improve the health of all people in Florida through integrated state, county, and community efforts."* The Florida DOH BPHL Chemical Threat Program looks forward to hosting the next statewide full scale exercise.

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CHEMICAL THREAT (CT) PREPAREDNESS

The CT laboratory coordinators are continuing to reach out to the health and medical community by offering training for CT preparedness at hospitals and county health departments. This training covers chemical terrorism awareness and the collection of clinical specimens after a chemical terrorism event. Hospital and county health department staff play an important role in the response to a chemical exposure event since clinical specimens will be collected for analysis. For your convenience and to increase participation, the training course can be presented at your facility. The course lasts approximately two hours including one 15-minute break. Florida clinical laboratory and nursing CE credits will be offered. Training manuals, "hands on" exercise materials, and CT preparedness kits will be provided. This training is recommended for physicians, nurses, epidemiologists, emergency department personnel, phlebotomists, hospital and health department laboratory personnel, and others who may collect clinical specimens. Contact the CT laboratory coordinators in your region for more information (see the Bureau of Public Health Laboratories Directory on the back of this document for contact information).

BUREAU OF PUBLIC HEALTH LABORATORIES ON-LINE TRAINING COURSES ARE NO LONGER AVAILABLE

As of July 1, 2013 the three mandatory courses, Prevention of Medical Errors, Florida Laws and Rules and HIV Update, for license renewal are no longer available through http://fldoh.ucompass.com/. They will be available next biennium on FL TRAIN. If you need these courses right away, please go to www.cebroker.com and click on the course search tab on the home page. Select FL Department of Health as the regulating agency and choose the appropriate selections on the next couple of screens. You will see a list of approved course providers to choose from.

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AMERICAN SOCIETY FOR MICROBIOLOGISTS (ASM) SENTINEL LEVEL CLINICAL LABORATORY PROTOCOLS FOR SUSPECTED BIOLOGICAL THREAT AGENTS AND EMERGING INFECTIOUS DISEASES

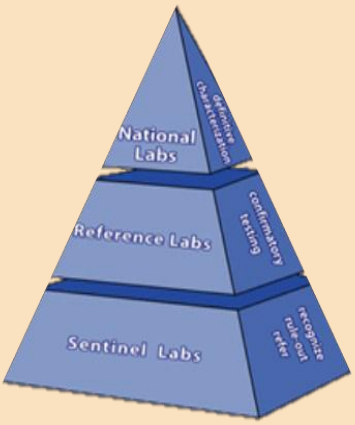
The ASM Sentinel Level Clinical Laboratory Protocols For Suspected Biological Threat Agents And Emerging Infectious Diseases for *Bacillus anthracis*, *Brucella, Burkholderia*, *Francisella tularensis* and *Yersinia pestis* have been updated. Please remember to update all of your laboratory's biodefense reference manuals.

In coordination with the CDC and the Association of Public Health Laboratories (APHL), the ASM has updated protocols designed to offer Laboratory Response Network (LRN) Sentinel Level Clinical Laboratories standardized, practical methods and techniques to rule out microorganisms suspected as agents of bioterrorism, or to refer specimens to public health laboratories for confirmation.

The current edition is compliant with the Clinical Laboratory Standards Institute (CLSI) format based on current information and recommendations of the APHL Sentinel Laboratory Partnerships and Outreach Subcommittee. These protocols reflect the standard practices for specimen processing as well as agent specific guidance. In addition to promoting standardization and uniformity of testing, adherence to, and maintaining the highest level of safety practices, is emphasized in the respective protocols. Updated guidelines can be found at the ASM website: http:// www.asm.org/index.php/issues/sentinel-laboratory-guidelines.

LABORATORY RESPONSE NETWORK (LRN) TRAINING—BIOLOGICAL

The BPHL is currently offering an LRN Sentinel Laboratory training course at no cost to you at your facility. This training follows the ASM Sentinel Level Clinical Laboratory Protocols for Suspected Biological Threat Agents and Emerging Infectious Diseases. Scheduling the training at your facility is a relatively painless process. Determine when you would like to have the training and how many people will be attending. A time will be set up that is convenient for all. The training materials are provided as well as the Biodefense Reference manuals for your laboratory.



The training syllabus includes: 1) an overview of the LRN; 2) the American Society for Microbiology (ASM) protocols for ruling out potential bioterrorism agents and how to refer a sample to the State LRN Public Health reference laboratory when a bioterrorism agent cannot be ruled out; 3) the role of the sentinel laboratory in responding to pandemic influenza; 4) a brief introduction to packaging and shipping of infectious substances; 5) an introduction to the CDC Select Agent Program; and 6) the College of American Pathologists Laboratory Preparedness Exercise (CAP LPX).

This class awards Florida clinical laboratory continuing education (CE) credits based on five hours of instruction. Please contact Betty Wheeler at (904) 791-1568 (Betty.Wheeler@FLhealth.gov) to schedule a class for your facility.

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