



United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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May 10, 2013

Memorandum

To: Regional Directors
ATTN: Park Superintendents

From: Associate Director, Visitor and Resource Protection /s/ **Cameron H. Sholly**

Subject: Disease Reporting and Response

Each year, the National Park Service Office of Public Health (OPH) responds to approximately 60 incidents Servicewide involving human disease transmission in national parks. These events range from single reports of mild disease (e.g. chickenpox) to outbreaks of diseases that can cause severe symptoms (e.g. the 2012 Hantavirus outbreak at Yosemite). In parks, disease transmission is facilitated by large numbers of visitors, close person-to-person contact, and exposure to wildlife and insect vectors.

Managers are encouraged to notify the OPH of any potential disease transmission events or concerns by contacting your public health consultant, the WASO medical epidemiologist, Dr. David Wong, or the WASO One Health Coordinator, Dr. Danielle Buttke. See attached OPH staff contact list.

Park managers are reminded to promptly report all [incidents](#), including:

- Incidents where 3 or more visitors, employees, or volunteers have similar symptoms or illnesses,
- Single reports of rare diseases,
- Incidents that result in death, cause serious injury or illness, and/or lead to overnight hospitalization,
- Wildlife encounters of concern such as bites, scratches, or attacks, and
- Wildlife deaths that do not fit known patterns. Many infectious diseases affect both humans and wildlife, and some diseases are transmitted from wildlife to people (these are called zoonotic diseases).

Once a report is received, the park will continue to manage the incident, and OPH staff will serve as subject area experts and consultants. The OPH will also assist the park in coordinating with local, state, and federal public health authorities.

Specific investigative actions the OPH may assist with include the following:

- **Verify the diagnosis**—Discussions with local and state health departments and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC); review of test results, and, if needed, request for additional testing and/or consultation; this step can take time and is an important sorting process to determine if reported cases are true events with likely park exposures.
- **Find additional cases**—Active efforts to find other visitors or employees with similar symptoms.
- **Describe risk factors for illness**—Among case-patients, identify commonalities and patterns that suggest which populations are at risk; may involve more detailed studies (e.g. standardized interviews, environmental samples).
- **Implement control measures**—Based on presumed or laboratory-confirmed diagnoses, initiate prevention and control measures; the situation is frequently re-assessed to see how well control measures are working and if additional interventions are needed.
- **Disseminate findings**—Throughout the investigation, OPH staff will communicate key findings (e.g. briefing statements) to park, region, and WASO managers; OPH staff can also assist with developing, reviewing, and disseminating educational materials.
- **Improve Prevention** – Disease transmission and outbreak response investigations are conducted in a no-fault approach with a central goal of learning from the event to improve long-term prevention; if warranted, findings may be translated into Servicewide actions.

Communication with the public and internal parties is key during any health incident. Throughout the response, OPH staff can serve as subject matter experts and assist with media, employee, visitor, and Washington office communications and ensure necessary disciplines within the park are engaged.

Control of communicable diseases is governed by state public health laws, and OPH staff typically conduct investigations in partnership with local/state health departments and/or the CDC. OPH staff serve a critical role as liaisons between public health officials and park managers to streamline the response.

Identifying hazards before they become outbreaks and taking actions to mitigate or eliminate risks is the best way to protect visitors and employees. If you think you have a potential public health issue, OPH staff are always available for consultation. Please do not hesitate to contact us. For more information about the disease investigative process, contact the NPS Office of Public Health – CAPT Chuck Higgins at charles_higgins@nps.gov. For questions regarding wildlife health, contact the NPS Wildlife Health Branch – Dr. Margaret Wild at margaret_wild@nps.gov.

Attachment