



Fall 2009

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MRC and USPHS Joint Training at Fort A.P. Hill

Nearly 100 MRC volunteers from across the United States participated in the largest ever joint United States Public Health Service (USPHS) Field Training this summer. The training was conducted at Fort A.P. Hill, an Army training facility located in Virginia, 72 miles south of Washington, DC. The facility was ideal for the training, as its austere and rustic environment provided a realistic setting for a deployment.

The MRC was invited to participate in the five training sessions, lasting 6 days each, by the Office of the Surgeon General's Office of Force Readiness and Deployment. MRC's participation in the training was a way to continue building on the spirit of collaboration started at the 2009 Integrated Medical, Public Health, Preparedness and Response Training Summit. MRC volunteers were fully integrated with their assigned USPHS teams from the moment they arrived.

For the first half of the week, MRC volunteers and PHS officers attended classes on emergency response operations. The training culminated in a 12-hour drill called Operation Charybdis, involving response to a hurricane disaster and a resurgence of H1N1 influenza. Participants were responsible for setting up and running a shelter. One-half of the

participants played the role of victims while the other half ran the shelter.

After the first half of the drill, participants switched roles, and the focus of the exercise stressed the continuity of care with the establishment of a Federal Medical Station. As the exercise continued into the night, participants were given an additional obstacle: a fire simulation. Participants had to evacuate and re-evaluate their patients and transport them back to the hospital after the fire was extinguished.

“Nearly 100 MRC volunteers from across the United States participated...”

The next day, the teams spent the morning reviewing their performance and later attended a graduation ceremony and cook-out to congratulate the participants for their hard work. Many USPHS Officers commented that the MRC volunteers brought a diverse skill set and varied experience, providing valuable knowledge to the teams they augmented.

Many MRC volunteers agreed that the training was rigorous, but ultimately rewarding. The experience provided volunteers with a better understanding of a response situation and expanded the MRC volunteers' understanding of their own roles and that of the PHS in a response. In addition, they built lasting bonds with Officers and fellow volunteers. ★

MRC volunteers with CDR Nair.



Volunteers and PHS Officers on a training course.



National Notes



Dear MRC Leaders,

Widespread transmission of the novel H1N1 Influenza virus is of great concern for local communities, state authorities, and national leadership. Fortunately, this situation is one that many Medical Reserve Corps (MRC) units have planned, trained, and exercised for over the past few years. The MRC has been extremely

proactive in preparing for and responding to this outbreak, and all of you should be very proud of the work that you are doing locally and the network that you have contributed to nationally.

In August, the White House National Security Staff requested information regarding MRC activities related to H1N1. We queried MRC leaders about their current and expected participation in H1N1-related activities and received an overwhelming response from 596 MRC units, or approximately 70% of the MRC. We compiled the information into the report, *Medical Reserve Corps Units and H1N1 Influenza-Related Activities – September 2009*, and shared it with White House and Department of Health and Human Services leaders, MRC listserv members, and others. It is also available on the MRC Web site at [http://www.medicalreservecorps.gov/file/SwineFlu/MRC Units H1N1 Flu Activities.pdf](http://www.medicalreservecorps.gov/file/SwineFlu/MRC%20Units%20H1N1%20Flu%20Activities.pdf).

We found that over the past 6 months, many MRC units have been involved in a variety of H1N1-related activities. Some of the reported activities were: providing H1N1 updates to communities, encouraging the development of personal and family preparedness plans, reviewing and testing their unit's activation procedures, assisting officials with planning for a potential outbreak, providing flu prevention education,

and testing/exercising mass dispensing and vaccination plans. I encourage you to review the report, as it has specific examples of these various types of activities.

Now, with the arrival of widespread H1N1 transmission across the nation, MRC units are truly living up to their potential. MRC volunteers are participating in community and school-based vaccination clinics, supporting community education and awareness campaigns, staffing health department and community phone banks, providing triage or health care services, and a host of other activities. They are engaged in their communities and are helping to make them healthier.

Unfortunately, there are still some obstacles that need to be overcome. MRC unit leaders told us about a number of different barriers, including the availability of volunteers (many have full-time employment), lack of training resources, and insufficient funding. And, as we have been hearing since the initiation of the MRC, the lack of clear and consistent legal protections for MRC volunteers is still a barrier to recruitment in many areas. In some communities, it is even a barrier to the establishment of an MRC unit. Please know that we are doing our best to help MRC units nationwide overcome these obstacles.

I know your jobs can be stressful and challenging. Please know that your work is appreciated. Keep up the great work, and continue to let us know what you are doing by updating your MRC unit profile. We often share this information with national leaders, as in the H1N1 report I mentioned earlier. Your efforts show the tremendous impact of the MRC on public health and resiliency at the local, state, and national level. ★

Warmest regards,

// CAPT Rob Tosatto//

CAPT Rob Tosatto
Director
Office of the Civilian Volunteer Medical Reserve Corps

Unit Focus – Fillmore MRC

With an unsure H1N1 flu forecast in the future, the Fillmore (MN) MRC spent about 1½ months providing presentations to six local school districts on H1N1 and the need for MRC volunteers. This provided a large audience for the MRC unit—390 school staff from six school districts!

The school districts were contacted by MRC unit coordinator, Brenda Pohlman, who met with the school

administration to discuss the importance of why local preparedness programs should be presented at all school staff in-services.

The unit also discussed the MRC's goals, needs, and how to become a volunteer. Volunteer brochures were distributed to attendees; thus far, two people have been recruited as MRC volunteers. ★

Unit Focus – Fairfax MRC Hosts *Get Ready Fairfax!*

The Fairfax (VA) MRC unit hosted its second successful community preparedness fair, *Get Ready Fairfax!* on September 12, 2009. More than 800 people attended the event at the Reston Town Center Pavilion. The fair was an opportunity for the unit to use grant funding to target vulnerable populations and to educate the community about the all-hazards approach to emergency preparedness during National Preparedness Month.

Get Ready Fairfax! was organized as a mock medication dispensing site. The “passport to preparedness” guided participants through the event. At each stop, participants learned about the MRC, seasonal and pandemic influenza, and the services and programs of Fairfax County’s Health Department and Office of Emergency Management. Participants were sent home with a free emergency preparedness starter kit, which included a digital thermometer, hand-pump flash light, can opener, hand sanitizer, and other items.

The Fairfax MRC partnered with several organizations for the fair including the American Red Cross, Salvation Army, Fairfax County Fire and Rescue, Inova Health System, Northern Virginia Regional Health Information Organization, Community Emergency Response Teams, Volunteer Fairfax, and other Citizen Corps volunteers. ★



A participant learned about public health preparedness at *Get Ready Fairfax!*

Unit Focus – Marshall County MRC Unit Conducts POD Exercise

During the month of May, 30 volunteers from the newly formed Marshall County (KS) MRC unit conducted a Point of Dispensing (POD) drill that moved approximately 525 elementary school children through a POD in 2.5 hours. The volunteers included nurses, EMTs, law enforcement personnel, among others. MRC unit coordinator, Sue Rhodes, contacted local schools and asked whether they would participate in the POD drill—the schools were all willing to allow the children to experience this learning opportunity and to help the MRC unit.

The Marshall County MRC unit has held annual POD drills to assist the community’s public health emergency preparedness. “In the past, we have never had anything based around just kids in these exercises,” says Rhodes.

The POD drill scenario included the spread of pertussis, a highly contagious bacterial disease that causes uncontrollable, violent coughing, which can make it hard to breathe. When the children arrived at the POD site, they were triaged at the door and either directed to the “sick room,” the hospital, or they were directed to proceed through the POD site.

If the children were directed to proceed through the POD site, they were given a short presentation on how to properly cover a cough and wash their hands. The children were directed to sign in and receive “medication” (M&Ms). The unit ensured that parents understood that candy would be dispensed to the children, not real medication.

The POD exercise was the largest exercise that has been conducted in Marshall County, and overall, was a success. “It is ironic that the MRC volunteers will be revisiting this POD for H1N1 in the near future, so it has given everyone participating in the exercise an idea about what working with this number of people (kids) is like,” says Rhodes. ★



Students at the POD drill received their “medication.”

Unit Focus – Milford MRC Provides Health Education at Local Festival

The Milford (CT) MRC provided public health education to attendees of the annual Milford Oyster Festival, the largest 1-day festival held in Connecticut. The festival provided an excellent opportunity for 10 MRC members and additional Milford Health Department staff to interact with a crowd of approximately 30,000–50,000 people. The volunteers provided printed materials and promotional items to festival attendees, including disposable thermometer cards with influenza information, bug spray wipes, and more. In addition, nurses were available to answer attendees' questions about influenza and dates for upcoming flu vaccination clinics.

The volunteers also interacted with the children at the festival with a bean bag toss that was based on “3 Days, 3 Ways” (Make a plan, Build a kit, Get involved). The children enjoyed this game, and it was a great way to make preparedness an interactive concept.

MRC unit coordinator, Linda Gallick, commented that the event was very worthwhile. Gallick also says that one of the greatest successes of the festival was that the MRC volunteers had the “ability to reach a large number of people in a relatively short period of time for health and wellness education. We also have received a couple of follow-up calls from people who are interested in participating in our MRC.” ★

Unit Focus – UNM MRC Introduces Second Life to Volunteers

The University of New Mexico (UNM) MRC has taken training to a new level by introducing MRC volunteers to the world of Second Life. Second Life is a virtual world in which characters interact with one another through the use of avatars, which are virtual representations of people.

More than 1,200 MRC volunteers participated in Second Life and viewed online courses about pandemic influenza and how to organize a mass prophylaxis clinic. Volunteers viewed PowerPoint slides through Second Life about these key topics, which was very important because this was during the outbreak of the H1N1 flu. Second Life provided a much-needed education outlet to long-distance volunteers.

MRC unit coordinator, Luke Esquibel says, “We hope that is just the beginning of many opportunities to share technology with distance learning. Our hope is that with the advancement of technology, we anticipate more future meetings and lectures from around the country. We intend to keep the island (Second Life) for as long as funding is available. Simulation is the key to success. If we can practice until we get it right by using Second Life and other means, then problems become much clearer, and working them out can result in better understanding, better processes, and saved lives.” ★

Unit Focus – West Piedmont MRC

The West Piedmont (SC) MRC developed a survey in a joint effort with the state MRC coordinator and the Staffing Work Group, which consists of the Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC) employees from the state and regional levels. The survey was developed to assess the availability of South Carolina MRC volunteers who will be needed to assist public health with seasonal flu clinics and H1N1. The DHEC has experienced a decline in health staff; therefore, MRC volunteers will be needed to help protect the health of citizens.

The survey's results indicated that volunteers were willing to meet the requirements of DHEC, which means they agreed to take the required training for OSHA Blood Borne Pathogens and HIPAA and receive the immunizations. The HIPAA training has been changed for volunteers who are assisting DHEC with the H1N1 flu vaccination campaign. To expedite the process, DHEC has implemented a new policy that

exempts volunteers—including the MRC and emergency responders from HIPAA training—by allowing them to sign a disclosure form in lieu of taking training. The form is used in place of training because the unit believes that nurses have already received HIPAA training from their employers in clinical and hospital settings. This process is similar for the OSHA training, which also has been reduced because nurses have already received this training.

Deborah Derrick said that the West Piedmont MRC is delighted with the results from the survey and that they “have already contacted many of the volunteers to assist [us] with the seasonal flu campaign, which begins September 19, 2009. We will continue to call upon the services of the volunteers to assist with the H1N1 campaign as well.” ★

Unit Focus – Atlantic County MRC

To prepare Atlantic County (NJ) for the upcoming fall H1N1 and flu season, the local Atlantic County MRC unit held a training exercise during a quarterly meeting at the Anthony Canale Training Center. During the training, participants attended a presentation that described the influenza and the differences between seasonal flu and novel H1N1. The presentation was given by Cathy Henry, RN, BSN, who is co-coordinator of the Atlantic County MRC.

The unit also distributed pandemic flu “go-bags” to volunteers who earned them. To earn the go-bags, volunteers needed to have registered on the NJ-MRC Web site and have been approved by completing a three-session orientation and IS-100/IS-700 (Incident Command System and NIMS). The contents of the go-bags were reviewed so volunteers could identify and replace any items that had expired.

The training successfully engaged 65 volunteers who were able to learn more about H1N1 and where to find credible resources. MRC unit coordinator, Ben Mount says, “The volunteers left with the message that they are important members of the H1N1 public health team and that everyone in the MRC has a role in helping families, friends, and neighbors in regards to public health emergencies. MRC units can help their communities prepare for public health emergencies, as well as respond. They can serve as surge capacity vaccinators at PODs [and] community health educators at flu clinics and health fairs.” ★



Volunteers at the training exercise designed the flow-through for a POD exercise at a school gymnasium.

MRC-TRAIN 101 for Volunteers

In the past, MRC unit coordinators often have requested an overview of the MRC-TRAIN learning management system. This overview is now available to unit coordinators.

Approximately 13 minutes long, *MRC-TRAIN 101 for Volunteers* is an online video that introduces MRC-TRAIN to volunteers through instructions on how to create and edit accounts, search and register for courses, use the “My Learning Record” feature, and retrieve forgotten passwords. This video will quickly familiarize volunteers to MRC-TRAIN.

To register for this course, direct volunteers should search for either “MRC-TRAIN 101 for Volunteers” or by Course ID 1019212 and click the “Launch” button on the Registration tab. Alternatively, unit coordinators can access their administrative controls to assign the course to volunteers via the “Training Plan” option.

The MRC-TRAIN Support Desk (mrcsupport@train.org, [202] 218-4426), the MRC Web site (<http://www.medicalreservecorps.gov/TRAINResources>), and MRC-TRAIN (<https://www.mrc.train.org>) provide MRC leaders with a comprehensive set of MRC training resources. Remember, MRC-TRAIN is **FREE**, available 24/7, and on track! ★

New Resources

MRC Toolkit

Have you visited NACCHO’s MRC Toolkit lately? The MRC Toolkit, part of NACCHO’s Toolbox, features more than 50 helpful and effective tools designed to help your MRC unit, including tools specifically designed for pandemic influenza. To access the MRC Toolkit, visit the NACCHO Toolbox at: <http://www.naccho.org/toolbox>.

Federal Funding and Planning Priorities for Local Public Health Preparedness

This research brief is an update to the NACCHO 2007 report *Federal Funding for Public Health Preparedness: Implications and Ongoing Issues for Local Health Officials* and the 2008 research brief *Indicators of Progress in Local Public Health Preparedness*, which evaluated progress in public health preparedness at the local level, the ongoing needs of local health departments, and the impact of changes to Federal funding for state and local public health preparedness. To view the research brief, visit: <http://www.naccho.org/publications>. ★

MRC Spotlights

MRC Unit Spotlight

The Southwest Alabama MRC unit has 140 volunteers and serves more than 550,000 people in Mobile, Baldwin, Escambia, and Monroe Counties. This unit found resources and community agencies to work around inadequate funding and support the Surgeon General's public health priorities. The Southwest Alabama MRC unit has engaged in various activities including the development of educational materials and resources for pandemic flu preparedness, family disaster preparedness kits, and activities such as a community-wide field day of fitness and the homeless coalition.

The unit showed great strength and resiliency during Hurricane Gustav in 2008. Fourteen MRC volunteers were activated within 48 hours of the hurricane. The volunteers worked at special needs shelters throughout the region and dedicated more than 40 hours to clerical and logistical support, veterinary service, sign language and bilingual translators, and more.

MRC Volunteer Spotlight

The Missouri Region C North MRC is very fortunate to have Dr. Susan Krechel as the unit's medical director and as a volunteer. Dr. Krechel is a retired anesthesiologist and Fellow of the American Academy of Pediatrics. Her experience is invaluable to the unit, and she has shared her career experience with the unit in diverse, surgical, and emergency environments.

Dr. Krechel has reviewed literature, manuals, and the MRC Web site to develop the unit's strategic plan. She also continues to expand her knowledge in ICS and NIMS. In addition, Dr. Krechel has provided a framework for which healthcare professionals and MRC volunteers are being recruited and trained. In addition, she has helped to recruit MRC volunteers as team leaders or team members for a field hospital and mass prophylaxis training. ★

News from NACCHO

2008 National Profile of Local Health Departments

Did you know that 39 percent of local health departments (LHDs) utilize MRC units as part of their emergency preparedness efforts? NACCHO has just released *2008 National Profile of Local Health Departments*, a report that includes a description of MRC units and emergency preparedness efforts. LHDs and researchers can access this report to prepare proposals and policy recommendations, write reports, draw comparisons among LHDs, and illustrate diverse approaches to local public health. For more information, visit: <http://www.naccho.org/2008profile002>.

Unit Focus – Eastern Washington Unit Vaccinates More Than 5,000 People

The MRC unit of Eastern Washington shares a memorandum of understanding with the Spokane Regional Health District and recently assisted the health district with H1N1 vaccination clinics during the H1N1 resurgence.

The MRC unit's participation at the vaccination clinics was much needed. Becky Duffey, unit coordinator of the Eastern Washington MRC, says people were waiting in a line a quarter of a mile long at the vaccination clinic held at the Spokane Veteran's Memorial Arena. In addition, volunteers at two of the clinics vaccinated approximately 1,300 people each. A third clinic received 3,000 doses of nasal spray and 800 doses of injectable vaccine, but quickly ran out of the vaccine due to high demand. Overall, the clinics were very successful; however, one remaining challenge the vaccinators faced was that they had to turn away an influx of citizens older than 65 years of age.

After the clinics closed, volunteers vaccinated 5,500 people and dedicated 540 MRC volunteer hours to the clinics and 36 hours to H1N1 telephone banks. In addition, the Eastern Washington MRC unit recruited at least 20 new volunteers.

The MRC unit is looking forward to participating in more H1N1 vaccination clinics during the month of December. ★



Debbie Clinton, PA, RN, screened patients at the H1N1 vaccination clinic.

H1N1 Resources

To get the latest updates about H1N1, visit NACCHO's exclusive and up-to-date H1N1 Resources Web page at: <http://www.naccho.org/topics/HPDP/infectious/h1n1-index.cfm>. You can even add the updates to your RSS feeds or follow NACCHO on Twitter (@NACCHOalerts). ★

New Guidance Documents Available for the MRC

The Office of the Civilian Volunteer Medical Reserve Corps has released two new helpful guidance documents for MRC unit leaders and volunteers.

Media Relations: Getting the Word out About the Medical Reserve Corps—A Guide for Local MRC Leaders – This guide was developed as a tool to help MRC Leaders promote the MRC at the local level. It includes samples and templates for a news release, media advisory, and more. To view the guide, visit: <http://www.medicalreservecorps.gov/PromisingPracticesToolkit/GD/MRGuide>.

Promoting the Medical Reserve Corps Identity: A Guide for Local MRC Units – This guide serves as a resource to help promote and build awareness of the national identity while assisting units with incorporating their local identity. It includes guidance on the proper specifications of the MRC logo and tagline. To view the guide, visit: <http://www.medicalreservecorps.gov/PromisingPracticesToolkit/GD/IGuide>. ★



Public Health
PREPAREDNESS SUMMIT
2010 ATLANTA, GA
FEBRUARY 16-19

www.phprep.org

★ ★ ★ A Look Ahead ★ ★ ★

December

Safe Toys and Gifts Month

1 World AIDS Day

6–12 National Hand Washing
Awareness Week

January

National Blood Donor Month

February

National Cancer Prevention Month

6 National Wear Red Day

16–19 Public Health Preparedness Summit

<http://www.phprep.org/2010/>



We Want to Hear from You!

We need your help to make this newsletter informative, interesting, and beneficial to MRC units nationwide. Share news, ideas, interesting stories, and best practices, or tell us about outstanding volunteers.

Submittal Guidelines:

- Please include contact information (e-mail and telephone number) for followup.
- If you include photos, please send as a **high-resolution** JPEG, TIF, or EPS attachment.
- Digital cameras should be set for a high-quality image using the maximum megapixel setting available.
- Photo submissions also should include a caption or description of the event.

E-mail us at: MRCnewsletter@naccho.org

