

Developing an Environmental Public Health Surveillance System for England

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Abstract

Introduction:

The preventable environmental burden of disease estimated for the UK is 14%. To support primary prevention of non-communicable disease, robust information leading to actions that reduce environmental hazard exposures is required, that could support an environmental public health service and a Health in All Policies approach. In England, no comprehensive population-based surveillance exists that integrates environmental hazard and health information. Public Health England (PHE) decided to develop an Environmental Public Health Surveillance System (EPHSS), with a first phase to build capabilities for surveillance of acute incidents, and a second phase to extend to datasets relevant to chronic exposures.

Methods:

A governance system was established with representation across PHE groups. EPHSS development started from consultation of stakeholders in public health service, government, academia and NGOs. In 2014 user requirements were identified for phase one leading to development of software as a web-based system capturing information on environmental events and exposures of interest to public health and to be shared across contributing agencies. In 2015, 106 stakeholders were consulted for phase two, and user priorities and requirements related to chronic exposure were documented, with related software development expected for 2017-18.

Results:

EPHSS software for Phase one is expected to be completed in 2016, several topics were identified of interest to specific users, who are expected to pilot applications of acute incident information surveillance on topics including poisonings, housing-related chemical hazards, and exposures from waste sites. Phase two stakeholder consultation highlighted several priority topic areas.

Conclusions:

EPHSS has developed a tool expected to lead to improved intelligence across a range of sectors and thus support public health practitioners aiming to prevent acute and chronic exposures and related health effects.



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