

Proposed Legislation: Mandatory Syndromic Surveillance Reporting

Stakeholder Brief: Frequently Asked Questions

What is Syndromic Surveillance?

Syndromic surveillance is a near real-time, population-based, all-hazards surveillance system that was designed for bioterrorism and early outbreak detection, first established by the Washington State Department of Health (WA DOH) in 2003. This data, provided by hospitals and urgent care clinics across the state, is used by WA DOH to identify, investigate, and design data-driven, rapid responses to emerging public health threats. But this data is not just crucial for responding to emerging events; it also provides a comprehensive portrait of chronic disease burden, environmental threats, and injury load that impact the health of Washington citizens. Syndromic surveillance reporting therefore additionally supports the health-enhancing work and research of a number of statewide and national stakeholders.

What will this legislation do?

This legislation will mandate that hospitals with emergency departments report syndromic surveillance data to WA DOH. Reporting will remain voluntary for other settings, including hospitals that do not provide emergency care and outpatient clinics. Unredacted syndromic surveillance data can be shared among public health officials at local, state, and federal levels to the extent needed to protect the public health (RCW 70.02.050(2)), but is exempt from the Washington State Public Records Act to prevent disclosure of protected health information (PHI) except in the case of research projects approved by an institutional review board (IRB) or other applicable exception in RCW 70.02.050.

Why is this legislation needed?

Under the federal rule Meaningful Use, in Stages 1 and 2, hospitals with emergency departments and critical access hospitals are required to submit syndromic surveillance data to WA DOH. However, in 2017, this will become optional. Should facilities choose to opt out, this critical data set will be splintered, and our capacity to address statewide public health events could be compromised. In order to safeguard the system we have built together under Meaningful Use, we need legislation mandating syndromic surveillance reporting to WA DOH.

How can I support this legislation?

We welcome your questions, comments, and feedback as we develop this legislation. Your input is crucial to ensuring that syndromic surveillance reporting remains a robust and reliable data stream that can be used to protect and improve the health and well-being of the residents of Washington State.

Questions? Comments?

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