

# Health Alert Network (HAN)s at the State and Local Level



NATIONAL  
ASSOCIATION OF  
COUNTY & CITY  
HEALTH OFFICIALS

HAN at the Local Level

By Matthew Stefanak,  
Health Commissioner,  
Mahoning County (OH)  
Health District

In the course of a meningococcal disease outbreak in 2001 in Mahoning County, we learned just how important it is to keep primary care physicians (PCP) in the community informed. PCP's were as much on the front lines of our outbreak response as public health workers—many were besieged with patient requests for unnecessary prophylaxis and vaccine. They needed the latest and best information to counsel their patients; we couldn't get it to them in time.

Thanks to federal bioterrorism funding, we've developed a Health Alert Network broadcast fax capacity that reaches 747 physicians and veterinarians in Mahoning County and surrounding communities. (We learned from the raccoon rabies epizootic that veterinarians are part of the public health infrastructure, too!) We provide the content of each broadcast fax as an electronic document to our contractor, the Little Blue Book Company. This company maintains Physician MasterFile, an up-to-date listing of all practicing physicians in the area. Our cost for a two-page fax to all recipients in the Health Alert Network is approximately \$300.

Since creating this network, we've used it to remind physicians about disease reporting requirements, transmit our annual summary of reportable diseases in Mahoning County, and provide just-in-time SARS case definitions and patient triage guidelines. One of our broadcast fax communications is shown here as an example of the communication potential of a local HAN.

*For more information on Mahoning County's HAN, contact Matthew Stefanak at (330) 270-2855, [MStefanak@mahoning-health.org](mailto:MStefanak@mahoning-health.org).*



## *Mahoning County Public Health Readiness Initiative*

*District Board of Health • Youngstown City Health District • Struthers City Health District*

February 3, 2003

Dear local Health Alert Network member:

As you are probably aware, local officials have spend the last several months planning to vaccinate public health and hospital response teams against **smallpox**. I anticipate that the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention will approve our vaccination plan this week and we will begin to vaccinate about 100 response team members at the District Board of Health, Saint Elizabeth Health Center, and Forum Health Northside Medical Center shortly thereafter.

As this first phase of the smallpox vaccination campaign unfolds, we expect that you will receive many inquiries about the vaccine from patients and community members. **The CDC does not recommend smallpox vaccination for the general public unless there is an outbreak of disease.** In fact, the vaccine is not available for administration to the general public, although the President has said that it will be made available sometime in 2004 to any member of the public who insists on receiving it. In counseling patients about the vaccine, we recommend stressing that the vaccine risks outweigh any benefits in the absence of disease exposure. Response team members are all volunteers who are willingly accepting the risk of vaccination—without any immediate benefit to themselves—in order that they may care for smallpox victims and control any bioterrorist release of smallpox should it occur. **Guidance for clinicians caring for vaccinated response team members with adverse reactions is available from the CDC by calling 877-554-4625 toll-free.**

The District Board of Health has recently redesigned its website to make the latest information about smallpox and other emerging disease concerns more accessible. For the latest information about smallpox and the smallpox vaccination campaign, click on the scrolling news bar on the homepage at [www.mahoning-health.org](http://www.mahoning-health.org).

The District Board of Health has upgraded its **communicable disease reporting warm line**. The warm line can now be used to leave communicable disease reports evenings and weekends for patients from any health district in Mahoning County. Simply call 330-270-2855 and the phone system will prompt you to leave a voice mail message in the appropriate mailbox. Your voice mail will activate the Health Alert Network pager assigned to a duty officer in each of the three Mahoning County health districts. Please note that the City of Campbell has abolished its health department. **As of January 1, 2003, the District Board of Health has assumed responsibility for disease investigations in Campbell.**

Finally, we are welcoming over 40 local veterinarians to the more than 700 members of our local Health Alert Network who receive these periodic alerts.

Matthew Stefanak  
Mahoning County Health Commissioner

50 Westchester Drive  
Youngstown, Ohio 44515  
330-270-2855  
FAX: 330-270-9194  
[www.mahoning-health.org](http://www.mahoning-health.org)