

China, US open disease study center in Shanghai

June 29 2010, By ELAINE KURTENBACH , Associated Press Writer

(AP) -- American and Shanghai health authorities opened an epidemiology center in the Chinese city Tuesday to train experts in sleuthing out ways to prevent chronic and epidemic diseases.

The U.S. [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) is helping with training and technical assistance at the center that will be "driven by what are the major public health issues in this country," said CDC deputy director Stephen B. Thacker.

"We need more field epidemiologists in [China](#) and around the world and we need them better trained," Thacker told The Associated Press.

Outbreaks of SARS (sudden acute respiratory syndrome) and [bird flu](#) since 2003, and last year's [swine flu](#) epidemic have driven home the rising risks from new diseases or deadly mutations of [epidemic](#) ailments, especially in developing countries that may lack the infrastructure to cope with them before they get out of hand.

Earlier joint research in field epidemiology helped identify routes of infection for some of those ailments.

Some of the work has been related not to epidemics but to unexplained illness and deaths.

Experts traced mysterious clusters of deaths in southwest China's Yunnan province to consumption of certain wild mushrooms. Research

into cases of paralysis among leukemia patients prompted the recall of unsafe medicines.

Thacker said they also need more experts in the broad areas of public health, not just communicable diseases.

"We need to look at what's killing people, what's putting people in hospitals. Here in Shanghai, the leading causes of death are not infections, they're heart disease, stroke, injuries, cancer and so on," he said.

Wang Longxing, director of the Shanghai city Health Bureau, said the government is starting to invest more in prevention.

"We want to avoid the situation where people will only be willing to spend money to go to see the doctor when they are already sick," Wang said.

The Atlanta-based CDC has trained more than 3,000 epidemiologists worldwide since it began international programs 30 years ago, Thacker said, adding that, "We still have holes. It's not like we're there yet."

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