

New document guides hospitals in responding to infectious disease outbreaks

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A new expert guidance document for hospitals to use in preparing for and containing outbreaks was published today by the Society for Healthcare Epidemiology of America, with the support of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The guide was published in *Infection Control and Hospital Epidemiology*.

"This [guidance](#) details the role of the healthcare epidemiologist as an expert and leader supporting hospitals in preparing for, stopping, and recovering from infectious diseases crises," said David Banach, MD, co-chair of the writing panel and Assistant Professor of Medicine at the University of Connecticut and Hospital Epidemiologist at UConn Health. "Armed with the resources to develop and support key activities, healthcare epidemiologists can utilize their skills and expertise in investigation and response to [infectious disease outbreaks](#) within a hospital's incident command system."

SHEA and CDC collaborated in 2016 to form the [Outbreak Response Training Program](#) to guide healthcare epidemiologists in how to maximize their facilities' preparedness and response efforts to combat outbreaks such as Ebola, Zika, pandemic influenza, and other infectious diseases. The new document, *Outbreak Response and Incident Management: SHEA Guidance and Resources for Healthcare Epidemiologists in United States Acute-Care Hospitals*, leads epidemiologists through how to apply, use, and interact with emergency response structures, groups, and frameworks from the institutional to the federal levels, and provides an overview of essential resources. The

principles in the guidance are intended for acute care hospitals, but may apply to other types of healthcare facilities, such as free-standing emergency departments and long-term care facilities.

According to the guidance document, during a crisis the [epidemiologist](#) provides medical and technical expertise and leads infection prevention and control efforts, coordinates with institutional stakeholders, and provides input into internal and external communications.

"We will always be faced with new and re-emerging pathogens," said Lynn Johnston, MD, co-chair of the writing panel and professor of medicine and [infectious diseases](#) at Dalhousie University, Halifax, Canada. "This guidance is part of an ongoing effort to develop tools and strategies to prevent and manage contagious diseases to ensure patient and public safety."

The document is part of a partnership between SHEA and CDC to prepare for emerging and re-emerging infections by providing training, educational resources, and expert guidance for dealing with outbreaks in healthcare facilities. The program is designed to train U.S. [healthcare epidemiologists](#), who oversee infection control programs, to have the skills, abilities, and tools available to implement [infection control](#) practices and provide a leadership voice in responding to infectious threats.

To operationalize the guidance, SHEA will conduct an [outbreak](#) response workshop in January, develop and post toolkits based on the recommendations, and provide online training modules and webinars.

Provided by Society for Healthcare Epidemiology of America

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