

# Guidelines for Sharing Public Health Information



## PURPOSE OF GUIDELINES

The purpose of these Guidelines is to facilitate sharing public health related information, both individually identified and population related, between PNWBHA jurisdictions for the purpose of assuring prompt and effective identification of infectious disease and other agents that could lead to public health concerns in the region.

## DEFINITIONS

For purposes of these Guidelines, the following definitions apply:

- **Identifiable information** is specific to an individual and may include elements such as demographic information, address, date of birth. Information is “identifiable” if it directly identifies an individual or there is a reasonable basis to believe it could be used to identify an individual. Information may also be “identifiable” if it meets the definition as contained in an applicable law. This type of information is defined by applicable federal, provincial and state laws and the definitions in those laws may vary from jurisdiction to jurisdiction.
- **Infectious disease agent** is the causative agent of an illness or health condition that may trigger reporting requirements or requests under the governing law or regulations of the signatories’ jurisdictions or of the Governments of the United States or Canada or implementation of public health protection measures and/or emergency response procedures.
- **Health information** is written, electronic or visual information, identifiable or population based, that relates to an individual’s or population’s past, present or future physical or mental health status, condition, treatment, service or products purchased, and includes, but is not limited to, laboratory test data or samples.
- **Public health event** is an occurrence or imminent threat of an illness, communicable disease or health condition with the potential for cross-border implications that could trigger implementation of emergency health response procedures, reporting requirements or requests under the governing law or regulations of the signatories’ jurisdictions, or of the Governments of the United States or Canada.
- **Receiving jurisdiction** is a PNWBHA jurisdiction which collects, uses, or discloses health information within its jurisdiction that it receives from another jurisdiction.

- **Sending jurisdiction** is a PNWBHA jurisdiction which sends or delivers health information to another jurisdiction.

### **REGIONAL CROSS-BORDER COMMUNICATIONS AND COORDINATION**

PNWBHA will establish a joint task group. The purpose of the group is to develop and maintain procedures for sharing information necessary in effectively responding to a public health event. The group will meet and confer at least annually. The signatories will establish a process and/or location for their joint communication and coordination of information before and during a public health event.

### **DOCUMENT REPOSITORY**

Each jurisdiction should provide and maintain current copies of its respective statutes, administrative rules and regulations regarding public health events and infectious disease agents, and other relevant material. Jurisdictions should jointly identify and maintain in common a set of materials which they accept as reflecting the applicable laws and regulations of the signatories and the Governments of the United States and Canada.

### **SHARING HEALTH INFORMATION**

Jurisdictions recognize that sharing individual, population-level or epidemiological health information safeguards the health of their populations, and facilitates emergency preparedness and response. To that end, each jurisdiction will endeavor to provide to other jurisdictions all health information relevant to a public health event.

#### Specific terms and conditions for sharing health information

- Health information may be shared under these Guidelines only for the purpose of preventing, detecting or responding to a public health event.
- The sending jurisdiction's laws govern what health information the jurisdiction may share with another jurisdiction.
- Jurisdictions that intend to transmit health information understanding that the receiving jurisdiction will maintain and protect it according to the receiving jurisdiction's laws or regulations, subject to laws of the sending jurisdiction that are more protective of the information.
- The receiving jurisdiction will endeavor to notify the sending jurisdiction, at the earliest possible time, if it receives a public record disclosure or similarly named request for the sending jurisdiction's health data.

## Guidelines for Sharing Public Health Information between PNWBHA Jurisdictions

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- Nothing in these Guidelines requires a jurisdiction to send health information contrary to the sending jurisdiction's laws, administrative rules or regulations.
- The sending jurisdiction will transmit health information in the form it usually employs or in such other form as accepted by the receiving jurisdiction.

### **Approval**

These Guidelines have been approved by the PNWBHA Joint Coordination Committee and are subject to the laws of the United States of America and the Government of Canada and the PNWBHA constituent jurisdictions.