



News Release

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Utah Public Health Opens EPICENTER to Monitor Disease During the 2002 Winter Olympic Games

Media Open House on Friday

(Salt Lake City, UT) - Utah is bracing for a shock wave of Olympic visitors. When large groups gather, they sometimes are exposed to unwanted baggage: colds, influenza, injuries, food poisoning, and possibly biological or chemical terrorism. Monitoring these kinds of concerns is what the public health field of epidemiology is all about and why the Utah Department of Health (UDOH) is operating the interagency EPICENTER during the 2002 Winter Olympic Games. Beginning January 18 through the Paralympics, the EPICENTER will collect and analyze daily public health information from local health departments, emergency rooms, Olympic Venues, health clinics, pharmacies and other sites to quickly identify and prevent disease trends or outbreaks in the early stages.

“EPI” is short for epidemiology, which is the study of how disease occurs in populations. “CENTER” refers to the coordinated and centralized effort of all public health agencies during the games. “The EPICENTER will be the collector, coordinator and communicator of mutli-agency public health concerns and responses during the games,” says Dr. Scott Williams, State Health Olympic Officer and Deputy Director of the Utah Department of Health.

In addition to disease monitoring, the EPICENTER will also keep track of other critical public health roles such as food service inspection and regulating mass gatherings. Six local health departments directly involved in the Olympics will conduct hundreds of food and sanitation inspections at Olympic venues, community events and receptions.

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The role of the EPICENTER is to:

COLLECT and ANALYZE: During the Olympics, the EPICENTER staff will gather and analyze information from local health departments, Salt Lake Organizing Committee medical clinics, emergency medical services, hospitals, and environment regulators.

Utah's public health agencies are also asking key health care workers in the community to report any unusual or suspicious health concern. Others who will report information to the EPICENTER include the State Medical Examiner, the Utah Poison Control Center, health care providers, pharmacists, veterinarians, the University of Utah's Department of Family and Preventive Medicine, and a host of others. Employers with essential work forces such as emergency medical technicians or police officers are being asked to regularly review and report unusual absenteeism rates. All this coordination translates makes it possible to analyze information across multiple health care sites and identify trends that could have been missed by any one site.

COORDINATE: The EPICENTER will coordinate all disease monitoring, food service and mass gathering regulation activities across the six counties with Olympic Venues. The EPICENTER will assist with the rapid exchange of information between local health departments, state agencies, and the Salt Lake Organizing Committee (SLOC) medical clinics and other assisting agencies. The EPICENTER will act as a focal point to coordinate any necessary public health response that exceeds the capacity of a local agency. The EPICENTER is also being set up as an Emergency Operation Center that can be activated long after the Olympics are over.

COMMUNICATE: The EPICENTER will issue a daily summary report of Utah's health issues. The EPICENTER staff will issue media reports through the Health and Environment Desk at the Utah Olympic Public Safety Command's Joint Information Center at the Capitol. The summary reports will be available February 4, 2002.

The EPICENTER will also serve as a public health interagency communications center for the following state, local and federal health agencies:

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Utah Department of Health

Utah Department of Environmental Quality

Utah Department of Agriculture and Food

Davis County Health Department

Salt Lake Valley Health Department

Summit County Health Department

Utah County Health Department

Wasatch County Health Department

Weber-Morgan Health Department

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Region 8

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Food and Drug Administration

Environmental Protection Agency

Salt Lake Organizing Committee Medical

EPICENTER Media Open House

Friday, January 18, 2002

8:30 a.m. – 10:30 a.m.

288 North 1460 West

Utah Department of Health/Martha Hughes Cannon Building

Park and enter at the East entrance near the day care

Interview opportunities with health experts in food, sanitation, environment, disease monitoring, bioterrorism monitoring, health promotion, lab testing, emergency medical services, etc., will be available from a variety of Utah's state and local public health departments. **A variety of news releases will be available at the open house.**

NOTE: EPICENTER is pronounced EP-E-CENTER and is spelled with all capital letters.

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