



## Public health bulletin

A public health bulletin serves as the voice of the government, alerting professionals and the public to public health threats, providing updates on the control of infectious diseases and other health problems, and providing clinical recommendations and other guidance.

The purpose of a public health bulletin is to provide to health professionals and the public an authoritative, timely, and influential source of information and recommendations for actions to protect the public's health.

## Background

In 2015, Bloomberg Philanthropies launched the Data for Health Initiative to help governments build sustainable capacity to gather and use scientific data to guide decision making and policy development. One part of the initiative, the Data Impact Program, aims to ensure health policy makers use reliable, carefully analyzed data to make informed decisions.

## Public health bulletin characteristics

A national public health bulletin is a country-owned publication that achieves its authority through the scientific vetting of its content and a clearance process that ensures consistency with the government's public health programs, plans, and policies.

The bulletin helps to disseminate government-cleared reports and recommendations expeditiously, within days of discovery if a threat is urgent. Because the traditional peer-review model is too slow for such cases, the bulletin uses an expedited expert review model to provide the best available information as soon as possible when threats are urgent.

The bulletin should be regarded as a government priority and published regularly. To be timely, a regular monthly publication is ideal with early electronic releases when there is an urgent need for information.

Because the influence of the bulletin is directly tied to how it is perceived, it is important to build its reputation. Building a reputation as an authoritative and valuable publication takes time and continuity. The publication must be flexible and must evolve, but at the same time should retain its easily

recognizable identity. The name, format, and style of the publication should be chosen with great care at the onset so that changes are minimal. Most important, quality control must be thorough.

## What does it take to produce a public health bulletin?

CDC, through the CDC Foundation, provides technical assistance and financial support to establish a bulletin. Typical support includes identifying and hiring staff who will work under the Ministry of Health to develop and produce a country-owned publication that will serve as the voice of the government.

## In-country resources

Following are in-country resources needed to establish a public health bulletin:

- Authors of scientifically valid content including outbreak reports, surveillance summaries, and evidence-based recommendations
- Editors who can insure that all reports and other content are scientifically sound and clearly written
- Production personnel that can produce print and web page versions of the bulletin
- A government clearance mechanism through a designated contact who is willing to share information about national public health problems with the public and can rapidly verify that the facts in the bulletin are correct and the recommendations are consistent with government policies

## Technical assistance for the public health bulletin

CDC is prepared to give technical assistance to the editors by providing the following:

- Initial financial assistance to support staff hires
- Editorial guidance
- Support to develop standard operating procedures
- Assistance to develop oversight committees
- Additional technical training
- Support to build a network of professional scientific writers

## For more information

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## Checklist for establishing a bulletin

1	Name the publication
2	Decide on the initial frequency of publication
3	Decide on a target date for the first issue
4	Name the publisher (owns the publication, selects its editor-in-chief, has ultimate responsibility for the publication)
5	Name the editor-in-chief (ultimately responsible for the content and either reviews and edits all content or delegates review and editing tasks)
6	Select a managing editor (responsible for day-to-day operations, supervises the production staff)
7	Select a desktop publisher who can produce both a printed and online version of the publication
8	Create initial distribution lists—one electronic and one print
9	Develop or adopt a style guide for the publication*
10	Develop a clearance chain to ensure the highest scientific quality and concordance between statements and recommendations in the publication and established Ministry of Health policy
11	Identify sources for content (e.g., Field Epidemiology Training Program reports, regular analyses of routine surveillance data, evidence-based clinical or public health recommendations, non-governmental organizations research)
12	Develop criteria for acceptance and publication of unsolicited submissions
13	Create a scheme for archiving the publication that will make both current and past issues readily retrievable on the internet

\*A consistent style makes a publication appear more professional. For examples of styles, see: BMJ style ([www.bmj.com/about-bmj/resources-authors/house-style](http://www.bmj.com/about-bmj/resources-authors/house-style)); AMA Manual of Style ([www.amamanualofstyle.com/](http://www.amamanualofstyle.com/)); Council of Science Editors Style ([www.scientificstyleandformat.org/Home.html](http://www.scientificstyleandformat.org/Home.html))

## Checklist for strengthening a bulletin

1	Identify sources of content beyond current data or content
2	Decide what guidelines, recommendations, or official notices should be included in the bulletin
3	Create a format and design for new content
4	Decide on frequency for the additional content. Will the additional content be part of the regular publication or will it have a different frequency (i.e., quarterly)?
5	Develop guidelines for authors or governmental offices to submit content for publication

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