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Southeastern District Health Department Completes Health Preparedness Exercise

Pocatello – June 27, 2006 through June 29th Southeastern District Health Department (SDHD) participated in a full-scale, statewide exercise that offered public health, emergency services, hospitals, Center for Disease and Control, and Homeland Security the opportunity to evaluate their capability to manage a statewide emergency.

“We needed to practice providing services quickly to large numbers of people, test equipment, and determine feasibility of our current plans for large scale emergencies in SDHD’s jurisdiction,” said Ed Marugg, District Director.

The exercise began with client scenarios suggestive of Anthrax infection. Hospital, emergency management, and public health staff throughout the state were required to “diagnose” the threat and put plans and policy into practice in order to determine where the threat originated, who needed treatment, and initiate a request for Strategic National Stockpile (SNS) drugs to treat at risk residents. The SNS is a specialized package of medical supplies designed to be shipped to emergency sites quickly when local supplies cannot meet emergency needs. Once the SNS was requested, all eight counties in SDHD’s district as well as Fort Hall Reservation and two mini Points of Dispensing (PODs) were opened in order to distribute the medication to the public.

SDHD has been working with the Local Emergency Planning Committees within its jurisdiction, recruiting volunteers, identifying POD location, developing emergency plans, and training all volunteer staffs. Collectively, between 400 and 500 volunteers were on hand June 29, evaluating their capabilities to efficiently administer medication to more than 2,000 “mock” patients that participated.

“During a district-wide emergency, needs would occur very quickly and we want to be able to respond almost without thinking to whatever threat is present. Completing this exercise has given SDHD staff, volunteers, and the public the confidence that we would be able to dispense the medications. This exercise further helped identify some of our weaknesses that we can now correct,” said Marugg.

SDHD will continue to prepare and exercise the “All Hazards Plan” that can be used in the event of a disease outbreak, natural disaster, or biological attack.

For more information about the SDHD’s Health Preparedness Program, call Penny Nelson at 239-5295.