

Weekly and Annual MMWR NND publications – do they meet the needs?

Date: Monday, June 15, 2015 Time: 7:30 – 8:15 am Location: Sheraton Hotel, Berkeley

Facilitators: Janet Hamilton, FL Department of Health & Ralph Coates, CDC

Key Objectives:

The key objectives of this roundtable are to better understand the current uses of the weekly and annual data reports from the NNDSS published in the MMWR, identify needs, and explore ways to improve the presentation and use of the data.

Brief Summary

NNDSS is a nationwide collaboration that enables all levels of public health (local, state, territorial, and federal) to share health information required to monitor, control and prevent the occurrence and spread of infectious and some noninfectious conditions that are designated as “nationally notifiable” by CSTE. The NNDSS data are voluntarily shared with CDC and a limited set of data are made available by the Division of Health Informatics and Surveillance (DHIS) through weekly and annual MMWR publications and online through CDC WONDER and data.CDC.gov. Data have been published in MMWR for decades. However, it is not clear now how those published reports and data releases in WONDER and data.gov are used, if they meet today’s needs, and what changes might enhance their utility. Current technology offers options for information dissemination that were not available historically and could further increase the usefulness and availability of the data. This roundtable session will engage participants in a discussion to inform improvements to the MMWR reports and to NND data access online. It is hoped that the dialogue will continue beyond the conference and will lead to improved reports that are more useful to public health users.

Questions: How to make NND data presented in the MMWR and online more useful

1. Do you read and use information from the NND data tables published in the weekly MMWR? If so, how do you access it (through MMWR publications, WONDER, data.CDC.gov, etc), how do you use it, and what kinds of actions are taken?
2. Do you read and use information from the annual MMWR summary of NNDs? If so, how do you access it (through MMWR publications, WONDER, data.CDC.gov, etc), how do you use it, and what kinds of actions are taken?
3. In both the weekly and annual reports, which tables, figures, text and data items are most useful? Why?
4. In both the weekly and annual reports, which tables, figures, text and data items are least useful? Why?
5. What changes, if any, would you suggest for the weekly and annual NND MMWR publications?
6. If aggregate data identical to what is currently in the weekly and annual MMWR tables were updated weekly in an online interactive dashboard that provided the ability to query, analyze and visualize the data (with the same data suppression rules in place as are currently applied to the MMWR publications), what, if any, information should continue to be published in the weekly and annual MMWR reports?
7. If MMWR publications are revised, what historical, archival tables that are currently included in the MMWR weekly and annual reports should CDC retain in a publicly available online site such as the CDC “Stacks” or CDC WONDER?
8. Should the CDC continue to publish in the MMWR weekly counts of NNDs in the “Current Week”?
For a case to be published in the MMWR weekly under the heading “Current week,” it must have been reported to CDC during that week and it must have been assigned by the jurisdiction to that “MMWR Week” (see attached document entitled “MMWR Week”). Cases assigned by the jurisdiction to that MMWR Week but reported later are published in the MMWR weekly in the cumulative total for that year, but are not published as occurring in a current week. In addition, jurisdictions assign a case to an MMWR Week for a variety of different purposes and the epidemiologic meaning of the MMWR Week varies by jurisdiction and by condition (see “MMWR Week”). Therefore, over a given year, the sum of the numbers of cases published each week under

Current Week does not equal the cumulative sum of cases for that year published each week. In addition, the counts of cases published under Current Week are not comparable epidemiologically across jurisdictions or conditions. Recently it has become clear to CDC that even experienced public health surveillance practitioners have misinterpreted the meaning of the numbers published in the column “Current week.” This situation raises several questions, including the following:

- Are the Current Week case counts useful for state, territorial and local epidemiologists or other readers? If so, how?
- Should these counts be discontinued?
- Should these counts be replaced by a different count? If so, what?

Changes Made and Proposed for the MMWR publication of the NND annual summary

- 1) The 2015 MMWR reports, nearly complete, will have minor changes. In response to a request from CSTE, the 2015 publication will include information on non-infectious conditions and disease outbreaks.
 - The combined infectious disease report and non-infectious conditions report have a planned publication date of December 2015.
 - The infectious disease report for the first time will not include historical data tables. Those tables will be made available online through the CDC “Stacks” (library), WONDER, and/or data.gov.
 - The non-infectious conditions and outbreaks included in the report are all of the non-infectious conditions that had been designated by CSTE as nationally notifiable when this publication was planned during the summer and fall of 2013. Historical data tables are included.
- 2) The 2016 MMWR reports, already being developed, will have additional changes.
 - Reports on carbon monoxide poisoning and acute pesticide-related illness related to non-occupational exposures will be included for the first time.
- 3) More extensive changes are being considered for 2017 and future MMWR reports.
 - DHIS will develop a proposal for the changes in consultation with CSTE, the CDC programs, MMWR editors, CDC science leadership and others.
 - At a minimum, the overall format of the publication will be revised, written reports will be shorter and simplified, and more of the data will be made available online with links from the publication.
- 4) The following are potential changes to MMWR surveillance summaries that are being discussed across CDC and that might be considered for the NND annual summary:
 - Data presentation may be limited to 2-3 tables and graphs illustrating major trends and the most meaningful findings. Summaries would not be used as “data archives” but would instead provide links as needed to detailed, historical tables and graphics made available for the public in the CDC stacks, CDC WONDER, and data.gov and through other interactive data dashboards.
 - Summaries would be written more like journal articles with concise narratives emphasizing interpretation and implications of findings:
 - A clear statements of the primary purpose & usefulness of the surveillance program & summary data, e.g., to assess the effectiveness of a program.
 - A summary of main findings for public health action & a single overriding communication objective.
 - Discussion of results in context of a) limitations to the surveillance data, b) recent published scientific literature, c) relevant evidence-based recommendations to improve population health, e.g., ACIP, USPSTF, or Community Guide, d) how the data might or will be used to improve existing programs & activities, e) how members of the public, public health organizations, & other stakeholders might make use of the findings & f) what the implications are for research.