



*For Immediate Release*

January 25, 2002

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## Press Release

### ***Update: Largest-Ever Deployment of CDC Epidemic Intelligence Service Officers***

### **Elite corps of 'disease detectives' deployed in record numbers since Sept. 11**

One hundred thirty six CDC EIS officers, or 93 percent of the total number of disease detectives at CDC, were deployed at least once to assist state and local public health agencies since September 11, 2001. The deployment of 34 officers to New York City on September 14 was the largest single deployment of EIS officers to one location in its 51-year history. Many others were assigned to monitor for signs of bioterrorism-related illnesses in New York, Florida, New Jersey, Washington, D.C. and Connecticut.

More than 40 of these disease detectives were deployed twice while a handful were deployed four and five times to various locations over three months' time. Most of the officers sent to New York provided around-the-clock emergency room surveillance, while others assisted the New York City Department of Health with a daily summary report on the number and type of rescue worker injuries and illnesses. The timely collection and reporting of data helped guide public health interventions for ensuring continued rescue worker safety. This included the distribution and proper use of personal protective equipment such as respirator masks and providing medical equipment to facilitate diagnosis of eye injuries.

"Officers responded quickly when local health departments asked CDC for assistance following the terrorism attack on U.S. soil," said CDC Director Dr. Jeffrey P. Koplan. "Through much personal sacrifice, these front-line disease detectives worked tirelessly to implement a rapid public health response. Their efforts saved lives."

Dr. Sandra Berrios-Torres, a native of Puerto Rico and the first orthopaedic surgeon in the history of EIS, was working as an



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EIS officer at CDC's National Center for Injury Prevention and Control in Atlanta. On September 11, she was one of the first two EIS officers deployed to New York City, spending most of the next 32 days working on rescue worker injury and illness surveillance at Ground Zero. On October 26, she headed to Phoenix, Arizona, to assist the Arizona Department of Health Services in establishing an Emergency Department-based Drop-In Syndromic Surveillance System before the start of the World Series. The surveillance continued for two weeks after the last game of the World Series.

"The goal was to implement early syndromic disease detection that could be indicative of a bioterrorist event and in this way facilitate a rapid public health response," she said. "This is the fourth health department I have collaborated with since becoming an EIS officer. They have all been absolutely positive experiences."

Once anthrax cases began to emerge in October, EIS officers were deployed to Florida, Washington, D.C., New York, New Jersey and Connecticut to assist with clinical evaluations of patients, the provision of antibiotics, data collection and environmental sampling. Others, like Dr. Jim Hayslett, an EIS officer normally assigned to the Texas Department of Health in Austin, counseled postal workers who might have been exposed to anthrax or who were concerned about exposure. One of only three CDC disease detectives with a pharmacy background in the EIS's 51-year history, Hayslett spent 16 weeks in the Washington, D.C. area, assisting with the anthrax investigation. He counseled 5,000 postal workers throughout the metro D.C. area.

"It's very helpful to have someone come out and talk to the workers," he said. "This type of interaction is pivotal for the public health process. We distill complicated public health messages for dissemination at the community level and we listen to their concerns."

Public health officials expressed appreciation of CDC's response. "When we called the CDC, they showed up within 24 hours. They brought tremendous scientific fire power," said Dr. Ivan Walks, director of the District of Columbia's Department of Health. In New York City, former Mayor Rudolph Guiliani requested that the EIS officers – who were deployed to emergency rooms throughout the city – remain on the job, even after the initial crisis had passed.

"The EIS officers are well-trained people who were there to get the job done," said Dr. Doug Hamilton, EIS director. "The EIS has a long history of providing rapid, effective response to public health challenges. Many EIS alumni have gone on to serve in key public health positions at the local, state and national level."

The EIS was established in 1951 following the start of the Korean War as an early-warning system against biological warfare and man-made epidemics. The program, comprising medical doctors, researchers and scientists who serve in two-year assignments, today has expanded into a surveillance and response unit for all types of epidemics, including chronic disease and injuries.

Since 1951, nearly 2,500 EIS officers have responded to requests for epidemiological assistance within the United States and throughout the world. Each year EIS officers are involved in several hundred investigations of disease and injury problems and their research enables CDC and its public health partners to make recommendations to improve the public's health and safety.

For more information about the EIS and to read profiles of EIS officers who have been part of CDC's emergency response to recent events, please visit the CDC EIS web site at: <http://www.cdc.gov/eis>.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) protects people's health and safety by preventing and controlling diseases and injuries; enhances health decisions by providing credible information on critical health issues; and promotes healthy living through strong partnerships with local, national and international organizations.

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**Note to Reporters:** CDC will arrange interviews with current EIS officers involved in CDC's emergency response efforts, as well as provide photos and footage. Call (404) 639-3286 for more information.

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URL: <https://www.cdc.gov/media/pressrel/r020125.htm>

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