NSSP UPDATE

National Syndromic Surveillance Program — BioSense Platform

March 2017

Welcome to NSSP Update

NSSP Update is published monthly by the National Syndromic Surveillance Program (NSSP) and brings you the latest news about the BioSense Platform and Community of Practice.

If a colleague forwarded this issue to you, we encourage you to subscribe to receive future issues.

BGG and NSSP Honor Joe Gibson

Surveillance expert Joe Gibson has inspired many of us through his leadership and pragmatic approach to tackling big projects. At our second annual grantee meeting in February, BioSense Governance Group (BGG) members honored Joe. Even if you already associate his name with the BGG, you might not fully appreciate the critical role he played in rallying expertise from across the nation 5 years ago to discuss issues relating to a platform that existed in concept only.

Joe drove the process of defining how the BGG should work and for identifying who should be involved. Seeing his leadership and dedication, community members asked Joe to chair the newly formed BGG. Through successes, setbacks, and CDC reorganizations, Joe worked tirelessly to build relationships at CDC and to keep alive the dream of a collaborative national program and user-driven BioSense Platform.

Joe also envisioned how the platform should look and function. He led the BGG in developing a community survey and persisted in getting tools that the community wanted, like ESSENCE, so that Platform users could characterize the health consequences of different public health events. He also worked closely with CDC and members of the BGG on a data use agreement that set parameters for sharing and protecting data.

Members of the BGG and NSSP express their appreciation to Joe Gibson for making the BioSense Platform a reality. *Left to right:* Michael A. Coletta, Stacey Hoferka, Joe Gibson, Natasha Close, Lt Col Paul Lewis, Bill Stephens, and Dave Swenson.

While leading the BioSense 2.0 effort, he served on two work groups for the National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) and on national initiatives including the public health community platform. Eventually, Joe moved on from the BGG. The foundation he built, however, has led to the successes the NSSP experiences today.

Program Manager Michael A. Coletta worked with Joe while at NACCHO (on two work groups) and attended interim BGG meetings that Joe led at the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials

(ASTHO) headquarters. "After I became the NSSP program manager, I met with Joe every week," Michael recalled. "Joe served tirelessly and is a large part of the success of the NSSP. It was my honor to be a part of the BGG's small token of appreciation at our grantee meeting. Thanks, Joe, for your service to the community."

NSSP and BGG Collaborate to Identify Clinical Needs

The NSSP Team is working with the BioSense Governance Group to communicate to clinical partners in hospitals the value of the BioSense Platform. This is a critical step toward ensuring support beyond Meaningful Use.

Call for Nominations: BioSense Governance Group

The BioSense Governance Group (BGG) helps guide the technical development of the BioSense Platform. Five seats on the BGG are up for election this year:

- Three representatives from state and territorial public health
- One representative from local public health
- One representative from nonpublic health data providers (hospitals, electronic health records vendors, etc.)

BGG representatives are leaders in advancing the practice and science of syndromic surveillance. Please submit nominations for these positions by March 15, 2017.

NSSP Transitions Legacy Data

The NSSP Team continues to diligently transition legacy data and aims to complete a third of the sites by early to mid-May. The transition is complex due to variability by site, data volume, site requirements, NSSP processing loads, etc. Consequently, the NSSP Team is working closely with each site to process data correctly, uphold data quality standards, and maintain program efficiency while meeting site specifications. The team expects completion dates for the remaining sites in late April.

NSSP Encourages Integration of SyS into Broad Public Health Surveillance

NSSP encourages practitioners in public health departments to improve how population health is monitored by integrating the near real-time nature of syndromic surveillance (SyS) data more fully into daily practice. This can be done in different ways. Some states apply CDC grants to setting up first-time SyS. Others want to partner with CDC programs already doing surveillance to demonstrate how SyS can work in tandem with other surveillance methods. And many states want to incorporate additional data sets (e.g., over-the-counter drug sales, weather) into a state's integrated surveillance system.

To support such varied interests, NSSP management follows up on opportunities with partner organizations, with individual sites, and within CDC. Here are some of the CDC programs interested in learning more about how the use of SyS might improve situational awareness and complement other surveillance activities:

- NSSP conducts exploratory discussions with CDC programs. Program staff in CDC's National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases (mumps/measles), the National Center for Injury Prevention (suicide), and National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion want to learn more about SyS. NSSP management will follow-up and look for opportunities to connect CDC programs with sites that will benefit from collaboration.

- **NSSP collaborates on pilot project during flu season.** The NSSP Team and CDC's National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases, Influenza Division, are conducting a data-sharing pilot project during this year's flu season. The Influenza Division is comparing data from ESSENCE to data from the U.S. Outpatient Influenza-like Illness Surveillance Network (ILINet). ILINet consists of more than 2,800 enrolled outpatient healthcare providers in all 50 states, Puerto Rico, the District of Columbia and the U.S. Virgin Islands and reports more than 36 million patient visits each year. NSSP follow-up with the Influenza Division will include historic analysis of legacy data being loaded to ESSENCE. This is one more opportunity in which the NSSP Team can move practice forward and help states demonstrate the value of integrating surveillance more fully into daily practice.

- **CDC uses BioSense Platform data to forecast Zika testing burden.** As part of CDC's Zika response, program staff from the National Center for Emerging and Zoonotic Infectious Diseases used the BioSense Platform to forecast the potential burden of testing for Zika. This work, although preliminary, sheds light on how the BioSense Platform could improve the national response to Zika. Integration of syndromic data with other surveillance mechanisms is a part of realizing NSSP's goal for improved situational awareness.

  You can learn more about the public health response to Zika by reading the *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* titled "Zika Virus—10 Public Health Achievements in 2016 and Future Priorities."

How to Change Your AMC/ESSENCE Password

Many BioSense Platform users have passwords that are ready to expire. By default, the Access & Management Center (AMC) and ESSENCE password expires every 90 days. Once your password expires, you cannot log in to ESSENCE until you reset your password via the AMC. Follow these steps to retain access to ESSENCE:

1. Go to the AMC:
   - Production: https://amc.syndromicsurveillance.org
   - Staging/Onboarding: https://stage-amc.syndromicsurveillance.org
2. If your password has expired, you'll be prompted to review the Code of Conduct and to change your password when you log in to the AMC. Complete the steps as directed by the AMC.
3. Once you've successfully changed your password, use it immediately to log in to the AMC and ESSENCE.

If you are unable to log in to ESSENCE, try logging in to the AMC to ensure the password is valid. If you still experience difficulties, please contact the NSSP Service Desk.

Visit the Community of Practice Web Portal
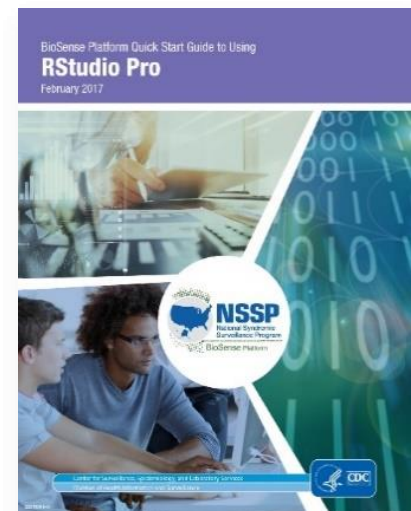
NSSP's foundation is its BioSense Platform and Community of Practice. Now you can connect to both through a web portal dedicated to syndromic surveillance. Not only will you be able to sign on to BioSense Platform tools and applications, you will be able to connect with like-minded members of the community via forums, training opportunities, and other means of knowledge sharing.

The International Society for Disease Surveillance (ISDS) oversees Community of Practice resources through a cooperative agreement with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The portal links to ISDS's newly revamped site, the BioSense Platform and other NSSP resources, and various state and local public health websites for syndromic surveillance. Portal content will expand over time in response to community input and interests.

NSSP Releases Quick Start Guide

The new *BioSense Platform Quick Start Guide to Using RStudio Pro* is available. The guide demonstrates how RStudio Pro can be used to analyze data on the BioSense Platform. You may access the guide via the Resource Center or Community of Practice Portal.

Share Your Successes!

An advantage to being part of the NSSP is your access to others—to their ideas, to their solutions, and to their successes. These successes run the gamut from innovative ways to transfer data and ensure data quality to tracking opioid abuse through new data sources.

We're interested in stories about how you and your colleagues have put best practices into your surveillance activities. We want to know how you've improved data representativeness; improved data quality, timeliness, and use; strengthened practice, or informed public health action or response. A story template is available on the NSSP website.

Check out the Kansas Department of Health and Environment success story on the NSSP website.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Mondays	Onboarding Support Calls: 3:00–4:00 PM EST
Wednesdays	Data Validation Support Calls: 3:00–4:00 PM EST
March 3, 2017	Webinar: **ISDS Website Demo** (www.healthsurveillance.org). 1:00 EST Communications Director Mark Krumm will explain how members can share resources and hold discussions in dedicated work groups. He'll also describe the knowledge repository scheduled for release mid-March. Register [here](#).
March 7, 2017	Webinar: **ESSENCE Training on Using Queries**. 2:00–3:30 PM EST Learn the basic mechanics of ESSENCE and explore advanced techniques for using queries in features like myESSENCE, advanced graphing, and data downloads. The presenter is Wayne Loschen of Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory. Register [here](#).
March 15, 2017	Deadline for [nominations](#) to BioSense Governance Group
March 21, 2017	Scheduled vendor patches in staging environment: 6:00–10:00 AM EDT
March 23, 2017	Scheduled vendor patches in production environment: 6:00–10:00 AM EDT
July 11–13, 2017	2017 NACCHO Annual Conference: [Public Revolution: Bridging Clinical Medicine and Population Health](#); Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

LAST MONTH'S TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

February 6, 2017	Quarter 1 onboarding began.
February 6–8, 2017	NSSP hosted the Second Annual Grantee Meeting, 2017; **Working Together in the New World: NSSP Revised BioSense Platform;** Atlanta, Georgia.

NSSP Onboarding

The NSSP Onboarding Team will bring new sites onboard in April 2017, furthering NSSP's goal to provide a national picture for syndromic surveillance. Sites will be brought onboard twice each year, in spring and fall. NSSP will announce the new sites after each completes onboarding and has moved into production.

NSSP Revamps Onboarding Website

The NSSP Web Development Team has revamped the Onboarding Support Website. The new site will launch in April. In preparation, you'll notice some changes to the online documentation throughout March. These updates will reflect new processes designed to help everyone at sites and facilities onboard successfully and will incorporate many improvements recommended by the community.
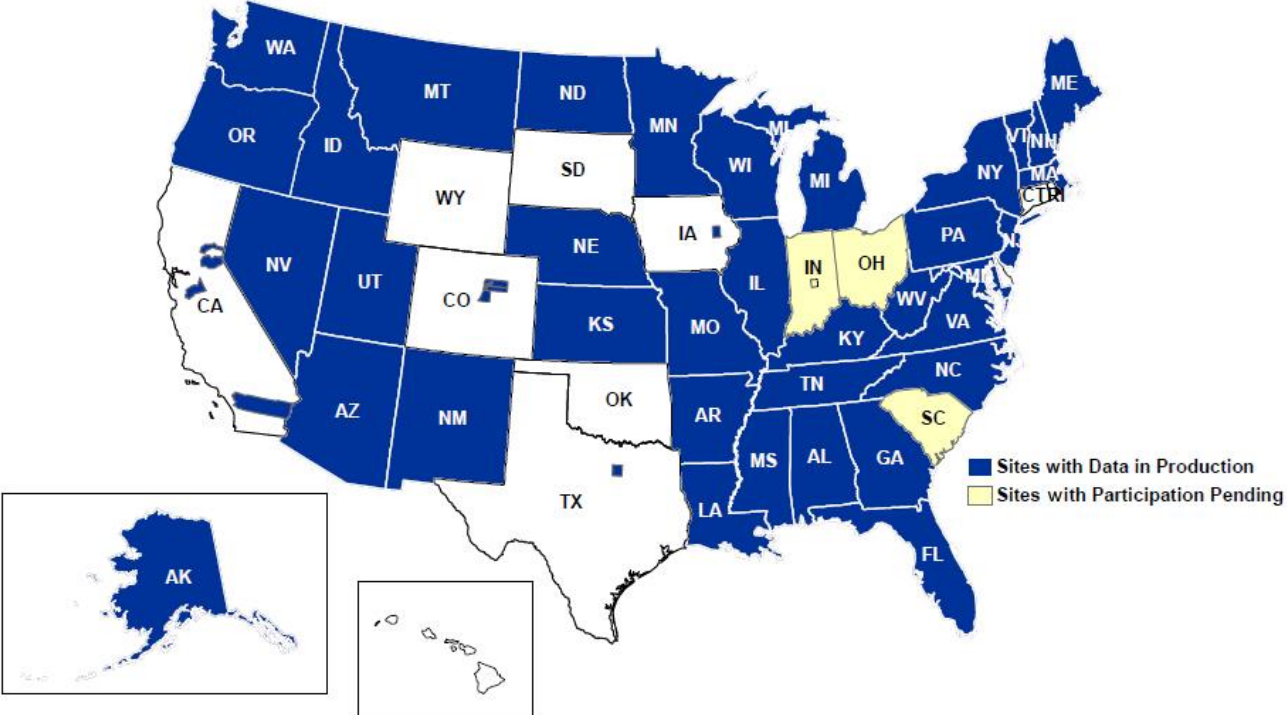
What's Your Preference?
- Do you prefer **online** to **print** onboarding documentation? **Both**?
- Does onboarding need more explanation? If so, what parts?

Provide recommendations to the NSSP Service Desk by selecting User Feedback.

Second Quarter MFT Planning

In April, the Onboarding Team will email site administrators a request to update their Master Facility Tables (MFT) with information about facilities scheduled to onboard in May, June, and July 2017. Please look for this request, and contact the NSSP Service Desk if you have any questions.

Onboarding Support

Conference calls are held by invitation every Monday, 3:00–4:00 PM EST, to discuss the process and to answer questions in a group forum.

Data Validation Support

Conference calls are held every Wednesday, 3:00–4:00 PM EST, to assist with data validation compliance. For more information or to download the template for validating data, contact the service desk.

NSSP PARTICIPATION

NSSP receives data from more than 4,000 facilities. These facilities represent about 55% of all emergency department visits in the country based on American Hospital Association data. Currently, 47 sites in 40 states participate in the NSSP. Two sites transitioned but paused their move to production. At least 14 sites are working on local data feeds with plans to transmit data to the BioSense Platform soon.

Definitions: NSSP consolidates facilities that provide data under a single data administrative authority called a *site administrator*. These facilities and single-site administrator constitute a *site*.

NSSP Hosts Second Annual NSSP Grantee Meeting, 2017

On February 6–8, 2017, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) National Syndromic Surveillance Program (NSSP) hosted its second annual grantee meeting in Atlanta, Georgia. Fifty-six (56) public health practitioners from 31 state and local health departments participated, many of whom attended ESSENCE training for beginner and advanced users. The meeting included presentations, roundtable discussions, panels, and poster session on different topics that enlivened the syndromic surveillance conversation and enhanced sharing of experiences and learning from different experts. Opportunities for improvement and collaboration were also discussed. You can find presentations from the NSSP grantee meeting on our website.

Other highlights included NSSP success stories by public health partners from Florida, Missouri, Nebraska, and Northeast region. To learn how you can share your successes with others, simply fill out the NSSP Success Stories Template posted on the NSSP website. Also, check out our first success story about a chemical spill in Kansas provided by the Kansas Department of Health and Environment. This success story demonstrates the importance of having protocols in place; shows the advantages of having strong collaborative relationships, especially during a fast-moving chemical emergency; and shows how syndromic surveillance can produce sufficient numbers to detect events and improve situational awareness.

COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE UPDATES

The ISDS team is proud to announce that its new website www.healthsurveillance.org is now live. You may access the website directly or through the Community of Practice portal, which includes links to NSSP resources and syndromic surveillance websites for state and local health departments. In the coming weeks, ISDS team members will work diligently to upload content from the old site onto the new and appreciates the community's patience during this final stage of website release. We encourage you to browse around and familiarize yourself with the new and improved website.

On March 3, 2017, at 1:00 PM EST, please join ISDS Communications Director Mark Krumm as he shows off the new website. Learn how to navigate the site and how members can share valuable resources and discussions in dedicated work groups. Also learn about the new knowledge repository scheduled for release in mid-March. After his presentation, Mark will answer your questions. Register for the webinar here.