

Health Information Compliance Alert

Disease Surveillance: NCVHS ISSUES SURVEILLANCE RECOMMENDATIONS

Disease knows no boundaries so neither should any system designed to track it.

So says a Feb. 27 letter from the **National Committee On Vital and Health Statistics** to **Department of Health and Human Services** Secretary **Tommy Thompson** in which the committee offers its recommendations for a National Electronic Disease Surveillance System (NEDSS). The goal of a NEDSS is to enhance health official's ability to identify and react to outbreaks of illnesses, whether natural or terrorist-induced.

NCVH's advice focuses on preventing the buildup of a patchwork system of incompatible surveillance systems.

"In our highly mobile society, outbreaks of illnesses are rarely contained within one political jurisdiction," opines the NCVHS. "Early identification of these outbreaks requires the collection and analysis of data from local, state, regional and national perspectives."

Among the letter's recommendations:

1. The **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention** in partnership with state and local public health agencies and existing Standards Development Organizations should fully specify NEDSS standards.
2. The CDC in accordance with state professional organizations like the **Association of State and Territorial Health Officials**, the **National Association of County and City Health Officials** and the **Council of State and Territorial Epidemiologists** should develop standards and implementation guides for data elements and transactions not covered by existing SDOs.
3. The CDC should develop a reference system against which states can verify that they have correctly implemented NEDSS standards.
4. The CDC and the **Office of Public Health Preparedness** should ensure that technical assistance is available to states as they implement the NEDSS standards
5. The use of NEDSS standards should be mandatory in the development of state and federal disease surveillance systems and public health information systems. Conformance testing for those standards should also be mandatory.