



THE STOUFFER REPORT

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Capitol Building, Room 332
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Missouri Receives High Scores for Emergency Preparedness

With the terrorist attacks and potential for pandemic outbreak that have come with the new millennium, the need for effective emergency response systems is as acute as it has ever been. We have emerged from a world of nuclear détente to one faced with airplane hijackings, subway bombings, and the threat of chemical weapons systems from international terrorists. Combined with deadly diseases such as SARS and avian flu, which have the potential for explosive growth, and the ever-present threat of natural disaster, state and federal governments are rushing to upgrade emergency health programs. Missouri's own accomplishments were noted recently when the state received high marks in a national survey of state response systems released by a non-profit organization dedicated to public health.

The report by the Trust for America's Health ranked Missouri among only 11 other states to score eight of 10 key indicators of emergency preparedness. Missouri's high ranking contrasts with last year, when the state received an average score of just five of the 10 indicators. This increase shows the success Missouri has had in improving emergency health services, which has been a top priority of a committee I serve on, the Senate Interim Committee on Pandemic Preparedness.

Among Missouri's successes referenced in the report is the State Public Health Laboratory, which has the ability to quickly identify biological threats and the appropriate number of trained laboratory scientists needed to test for suspected outbreaks of deadly diseases. Missouri was also credited with providing year-round, laboratory-based surveillance of influenza.

These findings point to the laboratory's mission to be prepared to rapidly respond to any public health emergency, including disease outbreaks, natural disasters, new and emerging infections, accidents, and acts of terrorism, whether biological, chemical or radiological.

The report also recognizes Missouri's commitment to public health programs by maintaining level funding from the 2005 to 2006 fiscal years. Missouri's disease-surveillance system also was noted for its compatibility with the national system used by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Missouri's dedication to preventing and responding to emergency health crises is apparent in the improvements it has made in its public health infrastructure. However, the nature of emergency response ensures that we will never be fully prepared for what's next. That is why we must continue our efforts to evolve along with the threats to our public safety.

If you have questions or comments about this or any other issue, please call toll free (866) 768-3987 or by e-mail at bstouffer@senate.mo.gov.

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