

CO HELP Line Activation Protocol

Introduction / Background

The Office of Emergency Preparedness and Response (OEPR) within the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE) maintains a contract with the Rocky Mountain Poison & Drug Center (RMPDC) to operate the Colorado Health Emergency Line for the Public (CO HELP). CO HELP serves as a resource for the general public during public health events/incidents by providing a manned call center that provides consistent, accurate and up-to-date information. This service benefits CDPHE and local public health agencies by offering phone call surge capacity so public health staff can focus on response activities. At this time, there is no cost to local public health agencies to use this service.

When the public calls CO HELP, they receive a recorded message, and then have the option to talk to a person who can answer specific questions, based on information provided to CO HELP by public health.

CO HELP gathers data from callers that can help inform situational awareness and response actions, including caller county of origin and date of call. Typically CO HELP provides OEPR with call statistics weekly, aggregated by county of origin. If call statistics are needed more frequently, OEPR can work with RMPDC to generate more frequent reports.

CO HELP Operation Hours and Contact Numbers for the Public

Operation hours: 9 a.m. to 10 p.m., Monday through Friday, and 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday and Sunday

Contact numbers for the public: Toll free - 1-877-462-2911, Denver metro - 303-389-1687

NOTE: If CO HELP numbers are placed on press releases, fact sheets, posters, websites, health alerts, etc., it is requested that both the toll free and Denver metro contact numbers are used. Costs are reduced if Denver metro callers use the Denver metro line. *Ensure that CO HELP is aware that these numbers are posted on public documents so CO HELP is ready to respond to calls.*



Process to Request CO HELP Activation

- When it is determined that CO HELP is needed during a response, contact one of the following OEPR staff listed below. During normal business hours, CO HELP can usually be activated within one hour; however, it is recommended to provide as much notice as possible.
 - Primary - Greg Stasinos - cell 303-598-9033 - greg.stasinos@state.co.us
 - Secondary - Lyle Moore - cell 303-957-8836 - lyle.moore@state.co.us
 - Tertiary - Garry DeJong - cell 720-708-8610 - garry.dejong@state.co.us
 - After normal business hours, call the OEPR Duty Officer at 303-594-5219.
- Create and provide OEPR with the following documents:
 - A brief written description or summary of the public health event/incident for which CO HELP activation is required.
 - A "Frequently Asked Questions" (FAQ) document about the specific event/incident. Suggestions for FAQs are provided in this document.

- Copies of any press releases, fact sheets, posters, websites, health alerts, etc., that will be issued pertaining to the event/incident.
- OEPR will provide the estimated time that CO HELP will be able to begin accepting calls from the public.
- If CO HELP receives questions that are not covered on the FAQs, CO HELP will email or call CDPHE or the local public health agency with the questions. It is necessary to provide CO HELP at least one CDPHE or local public health agency staff persons contact information. It is also helpful to provide CO HELP with the afterhours contact information for CDPHE or the local public health agency.
- If CO HELP hours need to be expanded due to the nature of the event/incident, contact OEPR. OEPR will work with RMPDC to determine the cost of the extended services.

Suggestions for Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

- General guidelines and tips for FAQs:
 - The following are examples of the types of questions included in the FAQ document. The FAQs should be formatted as a question, followed by the answer. For example:
 - *Q: What is hepatitis?*
 - A: Hepatitis means inflammation of the liver. Toxins, certain drugs, some diseases, heavy alcohol use, and bacterial and viral infections can all cause hepatitis. Hepatitis is also the name of a family of viral infections that affect the liver. The most common types are hepatitis A, hepatitis B, and hepatitis C.*
 - The majority of callers to CO HELP are lay persons/the general public, so questions and answers should be easily understandable. Avoid using technical terms and jargon if possible.
 - CO HELP is not able to provide medical advice and will advise callers with specific questions about their health to their health care provider.
 - If the event/incident is changes over time, it is necessary to update the FAQs accordingly. Any changes to the FAQ document should be highlighted or the "track changes" document feature should be used. This will help CO HELP staff ensure that the most current information is provided to callers.
- If the event/incident involves a disease, include disease-specific questions:
 - Information about the disease / epidemiology:
 - What is <insert disease name>?
 - How serious is <disease name>?
 - How common is <disease name> in the US/Colorado/local jurisdiction?
 - How will I know if I have <disease name>?
 - Who is at risk for <disease name>?
 - If I've had <disease name> in the past, can I get it again?
 - How long does the bacteria/virus/parasite survive outside of the body?
 - What types of food can be contaminated with <disease name>?
 - Does cooking kill <disease name>?
 - I think I have been exposed to <disease name> -- what should I do?
 - Where is the current outbreak of <disease name> occurring?
 - What is the state of Colorado/local jurisdiction doing to prepare for <disease name>?
 - Transmission:
 - How is <disease name> spread?
 - Can <disease name> be spread through the air?
 - Can I get <disease name> from contaminated food or water?
 - Can a person with <disease name> spread the disease without having symptoms?
 - Symptoms / incubation period:
 - What are the symptoms of <disease name>?
 - How long do <disease name> symptoms last?
 - How long does it take to start showing symptoms after being exposed to <disease name>?
 - I think I have symptoms of <disease name>? - what should I do?
 - Diagnosis / testing:

- How can I get tested for <disease name>?
 - How is <disease name> diagnosed?
 - Treatment / vaccine / post-exposure prophylaxis:
 - Is there a vaccine for <disease name>?
 - How is <disease name> treated?
 - Is there a cure for <disease name>?
 - If relevant, include questions around vaccination, including who should/should not get vaccinated, how the vaccine is given, the effectiveness of the vaccine, the safety of the vaccine, where to get the vaccine, when the vaccine should be received, etc.
 - If relevant, include questions around post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP), including the type of PEP, where to receive PEP, when to receive it, who will pay for it, etc.
 - Prevention:
 - What can I do to protect myself/my family from becoming ill?
 - Can <disease name> be prevented?
 - If relevant, include questions on recommendations around personal protective equipment (PPE), including if it is recommended, what is recommended, how to use it, etc.
 - Miscellaneous:
 - Can I donate blood if I have or have had <disease name>?
 - Who is going to pay my medical bills if I get sick from <disease name>?
 - Can my pets become infected with <disease name>?
- If the event involves a food or product recall, include questions around actions the public should take:
 - What should I do if I ate/used <recalled food/product name>?
 - I have the <recalled food/product name> in my house - what should I do with it?
 - If I wash/cook the <recalled food> can I eat it?
 - If relevant, include questions around a specific event:
 - (Example from Ebola: I heard the second symptomatic health care worker flew on a plane the day before her symptoms started. Should I be concerned?)
 - Can you give me more information about the current <event>?
 - Is the <event> ongoing?
 - Has anyone died from <event>?
 - How many people have become ill from this <event>?
 - How did this <event> happen?
 - What is public health/the government doing to respond to this <event>?
 - How was this <event> identified?
 - Has the cause of this <event> been identified?
 - Include information about vaccination/PEP clinics being offered by public health.