



Northwest Center for Public Health Practice

at the University of Washington School of Public Health and Community Medicine

Introduction to Public Health Surveillance

Glossary

Active Surveillance

Process where health departments (or responsible agencies) actively initiate contact with clinicians, laboratories, or other data sources to seek out information about disease occurrence and cases

Case Definition

A set of standard criteria for deciding whether a person has a particular disease or health-related condition, by specifying clinical criteria and limitations on time, place, and person

Passive Surveillance

Provider-based approach of data collection, in which health departments/CDC wait for disease reports to be submitted by laboratories, clinicians, and/or the public.

Public Health Surveillance

The systematic collection, analysis, interpretation, and dissemination of health data on an ongoing basis, to gain knowledge of the pattern of disease occurrence and potential in a community, in order to control and prevent disease in the community

Sensitivity

The ability of a surveillance system to detect epidemics and other changes in disease occurrence

Sentinel Surveillance

A surveillance system in which a pre-arranged sample of reporting sources agrees to report all cases of one or more notifiable conditions.

Specificity

The proportion of persons without disease who are correctly identified by a screening test or case definition as not having disease

Syndromic Surveillance

The collection and analysis of pre-diagnosis information that lead to an estimation of the health status of the community