



Iowa Public Health Tracking FAQ

This frequently asked questions document was created to serve as an information resource for Iowa Department of Public Health (IDPH) staff and external stakeholders on the progression of the Public Health Tracking project. This document is available on the tracking website at www.idph.state.ia.us/DWH.

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To submit additional questions for inclusion on this FAQ, contact Meg Harris at Meghan.Harris@idph.iowa.gov.

Why is the Data Warehouse (DWH) being replaced?

As with all technology, systems and applications become outdated quickly. There are now more efficient and effective ways to store and provide access to health data. IDPH, with support from the Environmental Public Health Tracking program, the Bureau of Chronic Disease Prevention and Management, and e-Health program, will be working with Microsoft Consulting Services to build a new Public Health Tracking Portal.

The DWH system (2008) is being replaced with improved and additional interfaces using the same database as the 2008 application. While additional methods to access the data will be provided, the data will be stored in three formats: raw data, data marts (a subset of raw data that conforms to a standard set of data elements) and cubes (aggregate data). IDPH users will have the opportunity to request access to the data in all three formats.

IDPH Information Management staff has been working closely with the DWH/EPHT team on staging raw data, creating data marts and building data cubes as part of the behind the scenes or “back-end” of the new portal application. By doing this work internally, IDPH will be better equipped to maintain the portal after the contract with Microsoft is completed.

A few positive outcomes of integrating these two projects are:

- The addition of water, air, cancer, birth defects, and child blood lead data
- The provision of nationally-consistent data measures, which are displayed by the other 22 tracking states with functional public and secure portals
- Use of cutting-edge technology for the management and display of data

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Who is building the new portal?

IDPH is working with Infusion, a Toronto-based company with experience building Environmental Public Health Tracking portals.

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Who is supporting the cost of the warehouse replacement?

The Public Health Tracking project is being supported through the integration of federal grants from three IDPH programs. They are the Environmental Public Health Tracking project, the e-Health program, and the Bureau of Chronic Disease Prevention and Management. State appropriations are not used to support this project or the staff associated with this project.

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How does the Environmental Public Health Tracking (EPHT) program fit within the Public Health Tracking project?

The overarching goal for both projects is the same—improving the provision of and access to health data. The EPHT program is an expansion of the previous DWH to include environmental health data previously inaccessible to IDPH and public. The EPHT program also aims to bring together data that is stored and maintained by several different agencies.

This project began after IDPH received a grant from the National Environmental Public Health Tracking (EPHT) program in 2009. The grant extends over four years; two for planning and two for implementation. August 2012 marked the start of the two-year implementation stage.

It was determined early on in the tracking project that integration with the DWH would be valuable. The warehouse was successfully built and used by internal and external health partners as a resource for health data. However, the DWH required modifications in order to meet the requirements of the tracking grant.

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How will the Bureau of Chronic Disease Prevention and Management (CDPM) benefit from this project?

CDPM is dually supporting the SharePoint upgrade and the development of chronic disease indicators within the new portal application. The bureau has identified a list of commonly used chronic disease health indicators and their source data. The intent of this effort is to create greater homogeneity between community health planning efforts focused in chronic disease, while providing uniform data elements.

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How will this project affect the day-to-day management and access to data within IDPH?

Initially, no processes or procedures will be changed from the way in which data is stored and accessed within IDPH. Rather, the portal will be a greatly improved tool for internal staff and external partners to use in accessing health data.

In response to the 2011 data needs assessment, IDPH is working to improve internal access to data. Part of that effort involves centralized storage of large datasets. The Public Health Tracking staff has been working with IM and programs throughout IDPH to catalog data dictionaries and key pieces of information needed to understand datasets and the ways in which the data are used. An incremental process will be used to move datasets from personal computers and databases, where the potential for corruption of data and loss of historical data is high. As datasets are targeted for migration, data owners will be asked to work closely with IM to verify data validity and processing required to maintain data integrity. Data owners will retain ownership and control over their data as they are the experts in understanding their datasets.

Moving data into a central location has many advantages. Staff accessing datasets will encounter the same source files. Also, audit trails will account for which data were accessed and when they were accessed. Data will be available to users at multiple skill levels. Those are **raw form** (no processing, including aggregation or cleaning), **data marts** (cleaned, un-aggregated files), and in **cubes**, which comprise the portal system. Structuring stored data in this way meets both the needs of the high-level statistician and the public health professional looking for statistics for a grant application.

The new data storage configuration brings us into alignment with state standards and is a major driving factor in this effort.

This process will take time and patience. Once complete, however, it will result in exceptional data storage and management in comparison to that of other state agencies.

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How is IDPH working to ensure cost savings and efficiency in this project?

The project team is working diligently to identify ways to save cost and create efficiency throughout the span of this project. Some of the efforts identified are routine aspects of the project planning and management process, while others are specific to this project.

- Coordinated project management and administrative team supervision
- Risk mitigation planning
- Project integration across IDPH
- Emphasis on knowledge transfer from Microsoft and subcontractor to IDPH staff
- Resource allocation and maintenance planning
- Internal database development of the application back-end

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How much longer will the existing DWH be available?

The existing warehouse will be available until October 31, 2013. Access to the previous site will be replaced by access to the new tracking portal's secure site. All existing users of the DWH will be migrated to the new portal and IDPH will verify their access in October.

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What datasets will be in the new portal?

All existing datasets will be in the portal-

- Birth registry
- Death registry
- Statewide inpatient discharge data (hospital discharge data)
- Behavioral risk factor surveillance system
- Census (single year age by race, ethnicity, gender at the county level)

New datasets included in the release of the new portal-

- Air monitoring
- Community water systems
- Birth defects registry (state-level view only)
- Cancer registry (certain cancers only)
- Child blood lead
- Housing data
- Poverty data

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How often will new years' of data be available in the portal?

Data migration for each previous year is dependent on when the census file is available. The portal uses a detailed estimate file to calculate rates and indicators. This file is typically released in early September of each year. However, datasets may be migrated and released earlier when calculations are not required.

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What other datasets might be included in the portal in future years?

IDPH is currently examining the ability to add the following datasets.

- Outpatient discharge data (emergency department encounters)
- Iowa Youth Survey

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Will the new portal require a username and password?

Similar to the previous warehouse, the new system will have two access points. The new system access points are the public and secure portals. The public portal will allow public access to health data. The public portal will not display any data that could potentially identify a person. The secure portal will require a username and password assigned by IDPH. Persons wanting access to the secure portal must apply and sign a confidentiality agreement. The secure portal will contain data that could lead to the identification of a person.

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What is SharePoint 2013 and why is the new portal being built in SharePoint?

SharePoint 2013 is an organizational interface that provides a succinct way to share data. Analytic tools used with SharePoint allow users to manipulate data stored within the constructs of the portal application.

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Will I be able to create reports in the new portal?

Yes. There will be multiple options for viewing data. Users will be able to choose datasets, filter data, view more than one dataset next to another, and export files for statistical use. Users will also be able to choose whether data is viewed in table, chart, or graph format. There will be several options for exporting data as well.

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What is a data mart and who will have access to data marts?

Data marts contain a standardized subset of data for individual datasets. In other words, data marts are source files that contain all available fields and individual lines of data within a given dataset. Data marts are typically used by statisticians or epidemiologists for analysis. By creating data marts, frequently accessed data within the department will be stored in a central location and all staff will be using the same source file. Databases containing the raw data in conjunction with data marts will dissolve the need to individuals to store and maintain large datasets on their work computers.

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Who will be able to use SharePoint once the installation and training are complete?

The uses of SharePoint extend beyond that of serving as an interface for interaction with data. The e-Health program will be the first program to use the new SharePoint product. Microsoft is building a contract management solution for e-Health. However, part of this project involves the training of two SharePoint administrators so that other programs will be able to leverage SharePoint after the e-Health project is complete.

IDPH is currently evaluating what Information Management resources will be needed after the portal project is complete. Part of that evaluation process includes identification of the staff resources needed to add new programs to the SharePoint platform. More information for IDPH staff about future use of SharePoint will be communicated through IM Central on the Intranet.

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Will SharePoint be used only for the new portal?

No. SharePoint is a highly flexible platform that may be used by many programs throughout IDPH. However, IDPH is still working to determine optimum uses of SharePoint and the method for prioritizing requests to use SharePoint.

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Will the fiscal contract management solution currently in SharePoint 2007 move to the new version of SharePoint?

The contract management solution in SharePoint 2007 used by the Bureau of Finance will be maintained. There are currently no plans to move the contract management solution to the new version of SharePoint.

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How do I follow the progression of this project?

Updates on the Public Health Tracking project are provided by IM and the Public Health Tracking staff monthly. These updates are posted on the IDPH Intranet monthly. In addition, the Public Health Tracking program releases a bi-monthly newsletter, which is also posted on the Public Health Tracking website at www.idph.state.ia.us/DWH.

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Who within IDPH is leading and driving this project?

The Public Health Tracking project manager is Meg Harris, located within the Bureau of Communication and Planning. Caitlin Lueck is a Management Analyst working with the project. The IM Technical Lead is Michelle Lenerz. The project involves many staff throughout IDPH from the Division of Environmental Health, e-Health and Bureau of Chronic Disease Prevention and Management.

Within the Division of Environmental Health, Rob Walker, Tim Wickam, and Heather Lloyd serve as part of the Environmental Public Health Tracking team. Carmily Stone and Ken Sharp are Primary Investigators working on the team as well.

Project oversight is accomplished using an administrative team comprised of three division directors and three bureau chiefs that meet with the project manager every other week.

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