



COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE PUBLICATION

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MONITORING OF HEALTH DURING WILDFIRES HIGHLIGHTED AT NATIONAL MEETING *County Health and Human Services Agency Hosts 2008 American Public Health Association Expo*

If you had trouble breathing during the 2007 wildfires and sought medical attention, you were among hundreds of similarly-affected residents tracked by the San Diego County Health and Human Services Agency's (HHSA) Public Health Services (PHS) division.

PHS monitored emergency room visits during the fires. The result was a snapshot of health trends that indicated the levels of respiratory conditions affecting residents and demonstrated the effectiveness of measures such as school closures. There was a clear correlation with the data PHS monitors and the air quality data collected by the County's Air Pollutions Control District.

On Oct. 22, 2007, at the height of the wildfires, PHS' surveillance revealed that hospital visits for respiratory problems increased over 110 percent as compared to pre-fire levels of hospital visits. There was no increase in visits among children, which suggests that advisories to close schools and keep children indoors worked.

The success of this monitoring system is one of more than 20 HHSA accomplishments scheduled to be highlighted at the 2008 American Public Health Association (APHA) Meeting and Expo, Oct. 26 – 29 at the San Diego Convention Center. San Diego County is hosting the event this year. Chairman Greg Cox, County Board of Supervisors, and Public Health Officer Wilma Wooten, M.D., M.P.H., will give opening remarks. Supervisor Ron Roberts also is scheduled to participate on a panel during the event.

"We're delighted to host this year's meeting, which brings together public health professionals from around the nation to share best practices," said Chairman Cox. "The County programs spotlighted at this meeting are great examples of the many innovative programs that our Health and Human Services staff conducts every year."

"At this year's APHA meeting, participants will get a good look at the studies conducted by various components of public health, including Community Epidemiology, Emergency Medical Services, Public Health Nursing, Tuberculosis Control, Immunizations and more," said Nick Macchione, Director, HHSA. "We're dedicated to serving the public efficiently and effectively."

"Our staff works hard on programs that improve the quality of life of San Diego County residents," said Dr. Wooten. "It's what they do every day, with extraordinary results."

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Supervisor Roberts will join state and local experts during a panel discussion on water fluoridation and its effect on dental health in San Diego and California.

Other presentations include:

- HHSA's Emergency Medical Services Division staff will show how the County developed a comprehensive response plan to find and assist vulnerable populations during a disaster. A database created as part of the plan facilitated the safe evacuation of more than 2,100 individuals from skilled nursing facilities and hospitals.
- County Immunization experts will present information on surveillance and outbreak response activities conducted during the February 2008 Measles outbreak in San Diego County.

For more information on other County presentations at the APHA Meeting and Expo, go to <http://www.apha.org/meetings/eventschedule/> and click on "2008 Online Program."

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