

## May 2010 Tornadoes

Oklahomans are very familiar with harsh weather events such as the tornadoes that struck in May of 2010. But what many Oklahomans may not realize is that public health responds immediately to natural disasters, providing key assistance to those affected and teaming with other local and state resources to insure that Oklahomans don't face health risks in recovery in addition to surviving a tornado!

Within hours of the tornadoes, the Oklahoma State Department of Health (OSDH), the Pottawatomie County Health Department, the Cleveland County Health Department, and the Oklahoma City-County Health Department evaluated the health risks associated with the disaster and deployed staff and resources to assist. Local emergency managers have become accustomed to quickly bringing public health on-scene to assist both victims and responders to natural disasters.

The primary efforts centered on preventing health problems associated with clean up and damage repair. Public health workers went directly to the hardest hit areas and provided tetanus shots to those persons who might be cut by debris. Public health workers also provided information about how to safely recover from the tornadoes. Food safety, carbon monoxide poisoning prevention and chainsaw safety information were a few of the educational resources provided by public health.

The OSDH launched one of the four state disaster trailers to provide an on-site presence. In addition, public health strike teams fanned out throughout the stricken communities, taking much-needed tetanus shots directly to residents unable or unwilling to leave damaged homes unattended. These strike teams coordinated with response partners to provide bottled water, gloves and other safety and recovery supplies.

Public health also coordinated with state partners to provide a united message regarding recovery efforts. Media updates coordinated through the Oklahoma Office of Emergency Management included critical public health alerts.

The response was coordinated by the OSDH Emergency Preparedness and Response Service (EPRS). Created in the aftermath of 9/11 and the anthrax attacks, EPRS has expanded the public health mission into rapid response. Federal terrorism prevention funding provided the initial momentum, but recent natural disasters have proved the worth of public health's role in community disaster recovery for all hazards.

**Working together, we can keep Oklahomans safe — no matter the public health crisis!**



The OSDH Disaster Response Trailer served as a central point for delivering tetanus shots to the affected community.

Public health plays a key role in disaster response. Known as ESF-8 (Emergency Support Function), public health provides assistance in many core functions including:

- Assessment of public health/medical needs
- Health surveillance
- Medical care personnel
- Health/medical/veterinary equipment & supplies
- Patient care & evacuation
- Food safety & security
- Public health medical information

