

Public Affairs Section

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Press Release

United States Government Supports Botswana's Disease Surveillance and Outbreak Response

The United States Embassy is pleased to announce it is supporting a specialized surveillance training course that will improve Botswana's capacity to respond to disease threats. The Field Epidemiology and Laboratory Training Program (FELTP) is a collaborative effort between the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Botswana (CDC Botswana), the Ministry of Health, and the University of Botswana. Press is invited to cover the opening ceremony of the training session on August 6 from 8:00am to 9:45am at the Oasis Motel. A question and answer session will follow at 9:45AM.

The first of its kind in Botswana, this course is offered in response to a request by the Ministry of Health. Deputy Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Health Shenaaz Il-Halabi said, "What I truly appreciate about FELTP is that it promotes the collaboration of public health laboratory professionals and epidemiologists in order to achieve common goals in surveillance and outbreak response to improve public health. This is an area that has challenged us in the past."

Whether the health threat comes in the form of a disease outbreak such as diarrhea, a disease such as measles that is preventable with vaccine, a chronic disease such as diabetes, or even preventable injuries such as motor vehicle related trauma, this course will train district teams to monitor, set up, and implement vigorous strategies to collect data to improve the health of the people of Botswana.

The goal of the course is to empower district teams to continually identify and monitor health concerns in their communities, and then to use that data to guide preventive interventions.

Five districts (Ngami, Bobirwa, Kweneng East, Kgatleng, and Gaborone) will each send teams of six participants for training. These teams include medical officers, community health nurses, monitoring and evaluation officers, health promotion officers, laboratory officers and environmental health officers. These teams will not only participate in classroom instruction, but they will return to their districts to conduct a practical 10-week project. FELTP is the international equivalent of the rigorous U.S.-based Epidemic Intelligence Service (EIS) operated by CDC. Technical staff from CDC Botswana who have completed EIS training will facilitate case studies at the grassroots level.

CDC Botswana Director Dr. Kathleen Toomey said, "We (in the U.S. Mission) are always ready and willing to assist the Ministry of Health when outbreaks of disease do occur, but what is wonderful and gratifying here is that this training will empower Botswana's health care workers to identify a threat and intervene before that health concern turns into a serious disease outbreak."

This first short course will be followed by a second in 2013 with the intention of covering all districts.

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