

Coordination Between DHEC's Three Core Deputy Areas

South Carolina is one of three states (along with Colorado and Kansas) that has one organization covering both public health and the environment. In South Carolina, that agency is called the Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC). Below includes a high-level overview of how each of the three core deputy areas within DHEC – *Environmental Affairs, Healthcare Quality and Public Health* – work together on priority health and environmental issues.

Lead exposure — DHEC works with healthcare providers and public water systems across the state to monitor and help prevent potential lead exposure. Including:

- Tracking lead exposure rates across the state and educating the public.
- Reviewing, monitoring and analyzing lead test results for children.
- The agency's public health nurses and environmental health staff conduct home visits together, where they educate families on risks and investigate sources of lead exposure.

Food borne illness — The food safety program provides education on safe practices and disease control experts investigate potential outbreaks.

Rabies incidents — Highly trained rabies and disease control staff investigate potential rabies exposure and answer questions from health care providers. This includes environmental health investigators, public health physicians, and the state veterinarian.

Vector borne illnesses — DHEC's environmental team helps local agencies with trapping of mosquitoes in the community. DHEC's health laboratory team then subsequently facilitates testing of the mosquitoes for viruses including Zika and West Nile. Also, when a human is diagnosed with a vector-borne illness, Environmental Affairs (specifically the entomologist) consults with Public Health on matters such as whether there was a risk that the person was infectious and able to spread the disease while in a location (usually their home).

Healthcare facility retail food safety – Environmental Affairs and Healthcare Quality collaborate on retail food establishment inspections. Environmental Affairs provides training and regulation updates with Healthcare Quality, which performs the food inspections at the healthcare facilities. These coordinated efforts provide healthcare facilities with consistency and minimal disruption to their operations in providing care to patients and residents.

Radiation Protection - The Atomic Energy and Radiation Control Act (13-7-40) designates DHEC as the agency of the state which is responsible for the control and regulation of radiation sources. DHEC's radiological programs work together on a regular basis across deputy areas to fulfill its duties under the act.

- These program areas share resources, including equipment and trained technical staff, to enhance the agency's ability to respond to radiological incidents and emergencies at nuclear power plants, and industrial, medical and academic facilities licensed to use radioactive material.
- Staff from Environmental Affairs and Healthcare Quality share the responsibility of upholding South Carolina's signed agreement with the US Nuclear Regulatory Commission ensuring the program remains adequate and compatible with federal requirements and work together in implementing Regulation R. 61-63, Radioactive Materials.

Joint inspections of abortion clinics — Healthcare Quality and Environmental Affairs work together to conduct comprehensive inspections at the same time.

Disease outbreaks in healthcare facilities – Public Health’s Healthcare Associated Infections (HAI) and Healthcare Quality collaborate responses and investigations of disease outbreaks in healthcare facilities. Opioid overdose prevention efforts – Healthcare Quality’s Drug Control and EMS programs collect and provide opioid antidote administration information to Public Health to make data-driven decisions in opioid overdose prevention efforts.

Medical needs shelters – Public Health and Healthcare Quality have been collaborating over the past few years to expand the medical needs shelters available during disasters including agreements with hospice facilities that would serve as medical needs shelters for some of the state’s most vulnerable patients during disasters.

Event Responses – DHEC has responsibilities under state emergency operations plans for ESF-8 health and medical, ESF-10 hazardous materials, ESF-6 sheltering, ESF-3 public works, and ESF-17 Agriculture. DHEC participates in plan writing, plan review, exercises, and emergency responses, and assigns staff to represent the agency at the State Emergency Operations Center (SEOC). DHEC maintains the Mass Casualty Annex to the State Emergency Operations Plan and participates in review and revision of a number of other sections and supporting plans which involve DHEC. DHEC also maintains the agency emergency plan and supporting standard operating procedures. DHEC responds to emergencies which require activation of the SEOC, and to public health outbreak investigations and responses. DHEC staff train for and participate regularly in state and regional exercises. Example of past responses are:

- **Ongoing response to the Pandemic** – Throughout the pandemic response, DHEC’s Public Health, Healthcare Quality, and Environmental Affairs teams have worked together to protect the health and safety of the public. This includes:
 - Working with our community partnerships throughout the state, including environmental justice groups, businesses, faith-based leaders and others to expand our outreach and public health messaging.
 - Reviewing and coordinating planning efforts.
 - Conducting more than **8.6 million tests** for COVID-19 and provided actionable test results quickly.
 - Launching a website that is the state’s hub for extensive data, information and resources that continues to be updated every day.
 - Completing in-person infection control inspections of all **194 nursing homes** in the state.
 - Creating an innovative process for performing more than **20,000 virtual food safety checks** that help ensure compliance with food safety regulations at restaurants around the state.
 - Carefully planning for and logistically tested the equitable distribution of vaccines that have begun arriving in our state to ensure that everyone who wants to receive vaccines in South Carolina will eventually be vaccinated.
 - Forming the Vaccine Advisory Committee to make sure that diverse leaders from across South Carolina were part of our state’s vaccine allocation and distribution planning.

- **Response to statewide hepatitis A outbreak** – In May 2019, South Carolina declared a statewide hepatitis A outbreak, the beginning of which was determined to be November 2018. The number of confirmed hepatitis A cases from Nov 1, 2018 through July 31, 2021 was 2,178.

Health and Environmental teams have worked with the restaurants to inspect the facilities, investigate possible exposures, and arrange for preventive treatment.

- The teams continue to work together to educate operators on employee health policies, including proactively providing educational materials during inspections statewide as well as through our partnership with the South Carolina Restaurant and Lodging Association.
 - Held more than **1,900 outreach and vaccination events** for at-risk populations.
 - Administered between Nov. 1, 2018 and July 31, 2021 **23,282 doses of vaccine**.
- **2018 response to Hurricane Florence** – During state of emergency and recovery phase, DHEC coordinated efforts to effectively address environmental and health issues (dam response, tetanus shots, well testing, boil water advisories, working with healthcare facilities).
 - **2017 Zika Virus Response** – DHEC’s team of medical, disease control, and environment health and emergency response experts worked together to provide overall coordination, offer technical assistance and connect local governments and communities with necessary resources if needed.