

Kansas ranks second in the nation for disaster preparedness

WASHINGTON (AP) — Kansas ranks second in the nation in planning for bioterror attacks and other public health emergencies, a new report finds.

The report by the Trust for America's Health said Kansas meets nine of 10 indicators of emergency preparedness. Last year, the state met only half the criteria.

"The success that we've seen this year is really from the productive partnerships we have with our local health departments, the hospitals and other agencies throughout the state," said Joe Blubaugh, a spokesman for the Kansas Department of Health and Environment. "We're

really starting to see those dividends pay off."

Only one state — Oklahoma — met all 10 criteria for full readiness, according to the trust's report released Tuesday. The group is a non-profit, nonpartisan public health advocacy organization based in Washington.

The trust's report initially said Kansas and Oklahoma tied for first, but the group corrected the study Tuesday after Oklahoma provided additional data showing it satisfied all 10 criteria.

Half of all states scored six or less on the scale of 10 indicators. California, Iowa, Maryland and New

“The success that we’ve seen this year is really from the productive partnerships we have . . .”

Joe Blubaugh,
Kansas Department of Health and Environment

Jersey were at the bottom, meeting only four of 10 goals.

"The nation is nowhere near as prepared as we should be for bioterrorism, bird flu and other health disasters," said Jeff Levi, executive director of the trust. "We continue

to make progress each year, but it is limited. As a whole, Americans face unnecessary and unacceptable levels of risk."

The report found that Kansas has enough scientists and labs to deal with a chemical terrorism threat and

test for anthrax or plague. It also has year-round, lab-based influenza surveillance, has two weeks' hospital bed surge capacity in a moderate pandemic and is one of only 10 states that does not have a nursing shortage, the report found.

Kansas maintained its seasonal flu vaccination rate for adults over age 65 and is at or above the national median for the number of adults over 65 who have ever received pneumonia vaccine. The state is compatible with the national surveillance system operated by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and it in-

creased or maintained funding for public health services over the past year.

But the state is not fully prepared to distribute vaccines or antidotes in a health disaster, the report found. Only 14 states met that indicator.

Blubaugh said the state is working to improve that. In August, the Kansas officials conducted a full-scale exercise to test the ability of state and local governments to detect a bioterrorism attack, and the state's ability to request, store and ship medicines around Kansas. More exercises are planned in the future.

Health authority seeks flexibility with Medicaid

TOPEKA (AP) — State health policy officials want Congress to make it easier for Medicaid recipients to prove they are U.S. citizens and entitled to benefits.

Members of the Kansas Health Policy Authority said Tuesday the backlog of applicants seeking health benefits was declining, but additional resources would be needed to improve the process and prevent lapses in coverage.

Since new, federally mandated rules took effect July 1, the authority estimates between 18,000 and 20,000 of the 308,000 Kansans on Medicaid and the state's children's health program have lost coverage. However, it is expected that 70 percent of those low-income Kansans ultimately will prove their citizenship and get benefits.

Kansas will spend \$2.2 billion in federal and state funds on Medicaid this year, with the state's portion totaling \$750 million.

Andrew Allison, deputy director of the authority, said the backlog of applications awaiting verification initially grew rapidly, but additional staff hours had helped to reduce the load. Still, additional resources will be needed to further reduce the backlog and make sure eligible Kansans are covered.

"I think that states are still in the early stages of understanding the impact," Allison said.

The authority is asking the Legislature to appropriate additional funds to hire more staff to help applicants prove their citizenship, restore benefits and shrink the backlog.

"It won't go away even if the Legislature provides the resources," Allison said.

Medicaid applicants can prove their citizenship by providing a passport or other documents, such as a birth certificate, and their identities with a document such as a driver's license. The new requirements have resulted in more telephone calls to the Kansas Family Medical Clearinghouse seeking assistance in verification and completing applications for benefits.

The authority believes that about 70 percent of those initially denied benefits will gain them once they locate necessary paperwork, including tracking down birth certificates from other states. While board members don't question the intent of verifying citizenship, they would like changes made to give them more flexibility in restoring benefits and prevent unnecessary gaps in health care.

They're Here & They're Up and Running

**The NEW Fuel Pumps at
The Hi-Plains Coop Service Station**
470 North Nashville Phone 462-8671

*Along with our Daily Full Service, We NOW can provide
24 Hour Self-Service at our Service Station as well as
at our Cardrol on Country Club Drive.
Use your Coop Card or Major Credit Card.*

Join us.....

*Christmas Customer
Appreciation*

~ Open House ~

Friday, December 15th
10 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.

*This is our way of saying "Thank You"
for your patronage as we look forward to
another year of friendship with you.
Please stop in and enjoy refreshments
and say "hello".*

**COLBY
FREE PRESS**
155 W. 5th, Colby