

# PROTECTING OREGON FROM COMMUNICABLE DISEASE THREATS

## Public health: critical role in communicable disease protection

Oregon's public health system protects people in Oregon from emerging diseases, like Zika and Ebola, and from outbreaks like Meningococcal Disease and Cryptosporidiosis. State and local health departments investigate hundreds of outbreaks per year. Preventing the spread of communicable disease can save lives; improve health, particularly among Oregon's most vulnerable communities, such as infants and children; reduce healthcare costs and increase productivity.

## Gaps in protection

According to the [2016 public health system assessment](#), communicable disease prevention is only partially implemented in Oregon. One in four people in Oregon lives in an area where communicable disease control programs are limited.

Oregon's communicable disease control system is funded primarily through federal grant dollars, leaving little flexibility to perform work that is outside the scope of the grants. When outbreaks of disease occur, a rigid public health funding structure makes adequate and timely state and local public health response difficult.

## The solution

Funding a modernized public health system will increase capacity to protect all Oregonians from communicable disease by investigating and controlling emerging disease and outbreaks, including those associated with commercial products, and by conducting interventions, such as contract tracing and immunization, which quickly reduce the spread of disease.

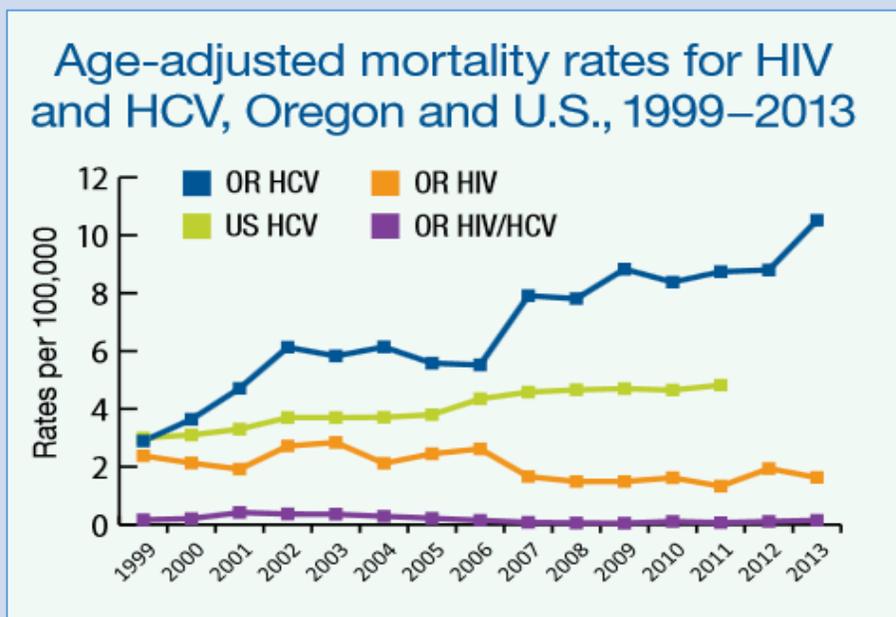
With additional funding, the public health system will prioritize the most significant communicable disease threats identified in the [State Health Improvement Plan](#). Oregon's public health system will work with partners to:

- Improve immunization rates
- Protect the population from foodborne illnesses
- Prevent health care acquired infections
- Reduce the spread of sexually transmitted diseases
- Reduce the burden of hepatitis C

By closing the gaps in the public health system, we can ensure that a healthy life is within reach for everyone in Oregon.

### Hepatitis C: a growing problem in Oregon

More than 5,000 people with positive hepatitis C tests are reported each year in Oregon. Oregon's mortality rate from hepatitis C was nearly twice the national average in 2011. Rates of chronic hepatitis C infection are disproportionately high in people born between 1945 and 1965 and in American Indians, Alaska Natives and African Americans. The public health system does not typically have the resources to investigate the extent of outbreaks, assess risk of transmission for vulnerable communities, and provide information to communities about life-saving treatment.



Hepatitis C places a huge burden on health systems. Liver cancer and deaths attributable to hepatitis C have risen over the past several years. A majority of hepatitis C-related hospitalizations were in people whose insurance was Medicaid or Medicare. Investment in public health could prevent new infections, support screening programs, improve health outcomes, decrease health disparities, and reduce future medical care costs.

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