

History: CSTE Position Statements

CSTE members provide valuable contributions to key public health issues that are important to their jurisdictions and impact policy and surveillance changes on a state and national level. The CSTE National Office facilitates the annual process for position statement development. The need for standardized surveillance case definitions dates back to the 1950s, when CDC's first Epidemiology Division Director, Alexander Langmuir, requested the first assembly of State Epidemiologists to decide which diseases should be reported nationally to the federal government. Since then, State Epidemiologists, our Council, have held the responsibility to define and recommend which diseases and conditions should be reportable within states and which should be voluntarily reported to CDC. The Council was originally founded to support the State Epidemiologists in this responsibility and has grown into today's CSTE. More information about CSTE and its history can be found [here](#).

What are CSTE Position Statements?

Position statements are documents developed by CSTE members that are focused either on policy issues or case definitions for diseases and conditions. These documents reflect the consensus opinion of CSTE's membership on each specific topic and are developed in close partnership with the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) (CDC). Policy position statements describe and recommend actions to address policy issues that could impact how states and localities enact laws around public health. Case definition position statements, known as standardized surveillance position statements, create disease case definitions that can be adopted by all health departments and the CDC for use in routine public health surveillance activities. This allows for cases of specific diseases to be defined the same way nationally.

Standardized surveillance position statements may also recommend that a disease or condition be placed under national public health surveillance and thus added to the list of Nationally Notifiable Conditions (NNC) and recommend states voluntarily share information on those conditions with the CDC via the [Nationally Notifiable Diseases Surveillance System](#) (NNDSS). Position statements are used by CDC to submit approval packages to OMB to support Agency data collection and processes of the Paperwork Reduction Act. Position statements are presented to and voted on by the appropriate Committee (e.g., infectious disease position statements are reviewed and voted on by the Infectious Disease Steering Committee) during Committee Voting Sessions and then presented to the Council. The Council is formed by the State and Territorial Epidemiologists with the State/Territorial Epidemiologist serving as the voting member. Each State or Territory has one vote and position statements are passed by a simple majority.

What is a standardized surveillance case definition?

A standardized surveillance case definition can be broken down into two main parts: (1) what disease/condition-related patient information should health care providers and other data reporters report to public health so that epidemiologists can investigate that potential disease/condition, and (2) what constitutes a confirmed, probable, or suspect case of that disease/condition. Most standardized surveillance case definitions include both confirmed and probable case definitions, which public health departments focus their energies on investigating. The main purpose of a standardized surveillance case definition is to provide a baseline for consistent reporting and case classification (a.k.a. case counting) across the nation. CSTE standardized surveillance position statements also recommend which types of cases (e.g., confirmed cases only, or confirmed and probable cases) should be

reported to the public or reported to CDC. There are multiple types of data needed for a case definition, including clinical information, laboratory test results, epidemiology links, and sometimes vital records. These data are collected by state, local, tribal, and territorial health departments as part of the case investigation process and serve to inform immediate public health action.

What is a reportable disease or condition?

A reportable disease or condition is one that public health deems important enough to track and/or investigate for follow-up *within a specific jurisdiction*. All states (and several large cities) have unique and specific laws that outline which diseases and conditions are reportable to their health departments and who is required to report them. Disease reporters typically are health care providers, hospitals, and laboratories that perform testing, not the general public. State and local reporting laws also dictate how quickly a reporter should contact the health department, and those timeframes differ by disease. Diseases/conditions that are highly infectious or that are caused by bioterrorism agents may be required to be reported immediately, while less infectious or non-infectious diseases may be reported on a routine or monthly basis. All state reporting laws include a stipulation that all outbreaks or conditions of public health importance should be reported to public health. This allows some flexibility during public health emergencies for states and localities to require data be reported to public health without changing their laws.

What is the list of Nationally Notifiable Conditions (NNC)

Certain diseases and conditions are of such public health importance that they should be reported nationally to the CDC. This is called national notification and the diseases/conditions deemed appropriate for national notification comprise the list of nationally notifiable conditions (NNC). CSTE, in close collaboration with CDC, determine which diseases and conditions are included on the NNC list through the annual CSTE position statement process for standardized surveillance case definitions. Whenever a case definition is created or updated, the Council may review and approve the NNC status of that disease/condition. The timing for national notification is also defined within the standard surveillance case definitions. Diseases/conditions that are caused by bioterrorism agents or that are very fatal or highly infectious may be immediately notifiable to CDC within a few hours, while others are routinely notifiable and don't need to be sent to CDC urgently. However, states may also voluntarily share information with CDC on diseases of public health importance that are not nationally notifiable through approved notification channels during situations like public health emergencies or outbreaks.

What is the difference between reportability and national notifiability?

A reportable condition is one that must be reported from health care or laboratories to a state/local/tribal/territorial public health agency. A nationally notifiable condition is one that should be notified from a state/local/tribal/territorial public health agency to the CDC. Not all reportable conditions are nationally notifiable conditions, and sometimes, nationally notifiable conditions may not be reportable in some jurisdictions because public health reporting laws are solely up to the discretion of states. Once a disease or condition is placed on the NNC list, states may choose to require reporting by health care providers to public health agencies through laws, and then those public health agencies may voluntarily send as notifications to the CDC as the cases occur.