

## **“On the Road Again.....Building the Nebraska Laboratory Network”**

*by Tony Sambol, MA, Assistant Director, NPHL*

Much has taken place since the last NPHL Newsletter article was written on building the Nebraska Laboratory Network (Spring 2001). This process started with funding that the NPHL received through NHHSS from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Nebraska was one of the three State Public Health Laboratories (SPHL's) who received funding to develop and employ novel ideas to enhance public health infrastructure within the state. Although this process had began prior to 2001, the events of Sept 11<sup>th</sup>, and the following Anthrax Crisis delayed the implementation of the Nebraska Laboratory Network. Reported here are the accomplishments that have been made, with your help, in this area since 9/11/2001.

The NPHL has been working in many areas to enhance, or in some cases to establish, a relationship with your laboratory. Your patience and willingness to answer phone survey questions regarding laboratory ability to interact with the NPHL and/or the CDC via the Internet has been appreciated. Information gathered from this survey was instrumental in incorporating a laboratory component written into the communication contract that NHHSS sent to all of the hospitals. A key component of this contract was to have a computer placed into all laboratories to allow for Internet access. Prior to May 2003, less than 50% of hospital labs had Internet access; however, this number has now increased to over 80%. Electronic connectivity has been useful to allow for the NPHL to post timely and accurate information on its new webpage ([www.nphl.org](http://www.nphl.org)), or relay information from the NHHSS Health Alert Network (HAN). Recently, laboratory-related information has been sent-out regarding NPHL's ability to perform rule-out testing for the smallpox virus and SARS-associated Coronavirus, and to update information on West Nile Virus and as of late, Monkey pox virus testing. Personnel from NPHL and NHHSS will be collaborating on a survey this summer to further assess your laboratory. This assessment will help NHHSS plan a state-wide laboratory surveillance system for agents of bioterrorism or other emerging diseases.

In addition to telephone and e-mail communication, last fall the NPHL conducted 11 Laboratory Response Network (LRN) Level-A (now called “Sentinel Labs”) training sessions in 7 locations that included Scottsbluff, North Platte, Grand Island, Kearney, Lincoln, Norfolk and Omaha. These training sessions addressed the concerns and needs that various facilities had relayed to us through the Bioterrorism (BT) Survey that we put out last summer. We were pleased that 104 laboratorians took time out of their hectic schedules to attend one of these sessions and receive training, and more importantly 74 of the 86 hospitals in our state were represented. It is known that some facilities were unable to send participants because of staffing and workload issues and it is hopeful that all facilities will be able to send participants in the future.

A series of four two-day seminars have recently been presented by the Nebraska Center for Bioterrorism Education. A laboratory break-out session was held as part of these seminars. During these sessions, all laboratorians were invited to attend a “Laboratory Advisory Council” (LAC) meeting to discuss current issues affecting your lab. The input was extremely helpful to the NPHL and the State Epidemiologists to help chart the state's plan of action for testing clinical specimens during this West Nile Virus season. It is anticipated that the LAC sessions will continue in the future.

Finally, as the NPHL continues to enhance the Laboratory Network in Nebraska, it is vital that we receive your input and thoughts as to any training and consultation issues that your laboratory has. This fall, besides updates on biological agent diagnostics, laboratory training will focus on chemical and radiological terrorism events. In addition, Josh Rowland will be gathering information through a Laboratory Assessment Survey this summer, this will allow us to offer training on specific topics of your choice. Personnel at NPHL appreciate the support given and we look forward to a continuing efforts to help build a healthier state.