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News Release

For Immediate Release

"Contagion" Film Highlights Vital Role of Public Health

Contagion, the new movie released this past weekend highlights the vital role that public health plays in protecting the health and welfare of our community. Although the movie provides a fictional account of the world's response to a disease outbreak, there are some very credible aspects of this story.

"It is a real possibility that a disease outbreak could happen within our community, our country or some place in the world," said Kevin Gipson, Director of the Springfield-Greene County Health Department. Spread of a disease, or transmission, can occur rapidly considering the number of interpersonal interactions that take place on a daily basis, travel, and the ability of scientists to rapidly identify and determine a treatment to stop the spread of a specific disease.

Local public health agencies work to monitor disease trends and investigate suspicious or threatening disease outbreaks and sources. Reporting mechanisms from local health care providers offer constant communication about disease conditions that are determined to be communicable or rare in nature. Local public health epidemiology staff track disease information and work in coordination with state and federal agencies, including the CDC, if necessary. Coordination at this level occurred this past summer in dealing with a fungal infection found in people injured during the Joplin tornado.

Although disease outbreaks do not happen on a regular basis, the need for public health vigilance is always necessary. "We take pride in our work and the fact that we provide an invaluable service to the community despite significant challenges, including a growing population and decreasing funding sources," said Gipson. Funding for public health emergencies and disasters has been progressively reduced over the past years. This is concerning considering the potential impact that a disease outbreak of this magnitude could have on the capacity and resources of a public health response. The lack of funding also leaves less opportunity for ongoing education campaigns that could prepare individuals to protect themselves from a public health threat.

The movie Contagion does carry some notable lessons which include the following:

- Always take individual action to protect your health by washing your hands, covering coughs and sneezes and staying home when you are sick.
- Be proactive and prepared when it comes to knowing where you are travelling. For information about travel vaccinations, visit our website.
- Be prepared for emergencies.
- Contact your elected officials to support funding for public health programs.
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