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**NEW COMPUTER NETWORK WILL PROVIDE EARLY FLU
WARNINGS IN CENTRAL U.S. STATES**

System Originally Designed to Track Bioterrorism by Monitoring 911 Calls

Kansas City, Mo. – (January 27, 2005) – Public health officials in five central states may have the edge in spotting flu outbreaks this year. Officials in communities in the central U.S. will begin tracking potential outbreaks using computer software that monitors calls to 911, watching for spikes in flu symptoms.

The system, the first of its type, monitors trends in Fort Worth, Texas; Tulsa and Oklahoma City, Okla.; Kansas City, Columbia and Independence, Mo.; Kansas City, Johnson County and Sedgwick County, Kansas; and Des Moines, Iowa.

The influenza network uses FirstWatch® Real-Time Biosurveillance™ software to automatically monitor live data in 911 computers, watching for increases in designated symptoms, including respiratory problems, abdominal pain, headache and other indicators associated with the flu, whether they appear in geographic clusters or across the entire population being monitored.

FirstWatch was first installed in Kansas City, Mo., in 1999, to spot potential bioterrorism attacks, and is currently used by cities, counties and public health districts in 16 states, said FirstWatch chief executive officer Todd Stout. However, the new flu network marks the first time that it has been used to monitor an entire region for a specific threat, he said.

“Because FirstWatch monitors trends using real-time data, it lets public health personnel know there’s a threat they need to look at much earlier than if they were waiting for lab results or reports from doctors’ offices,” Stout said. “Aggregating data from different cities, as we’re doing with the flu-tracking network, makes it even more powerful.”

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“The chief advantage of this network is early detection, because it will let us see influenza as it moves across the other jurisdictions in the network,” said Scott Voss, public health emergency coordinator for the Johnson County Health Department. “Both influenza and bioterrorism are likely to be multijurisdictional, striking health districts that are connected geographically but have different systems for tracking the disease,” Voss said. “Through this new network, FirstWatch gives us a big picture of what’s truly going on in the region instead of a small snapshot of our own system,” he said.

FirstWatch alerted medical officials in Tulsa, Oklahoma City and Richmond, Va., to emerging flu outbreaks in November 2003. The new flu network represents the first time that the software’s users have collaborated on such a project. Officials in other cities and counties have already expressed an interest in joining the network, Stout said.

FirstWatch software currently protects more than 14 million people in 16 states. In addition to monitoring data from hospitals and poison-control centers, it tracks more than 5,000 calls to 911 per day, making it the largest and most comprehensive database of its kind. The company is based in Encinitas, Calif.

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