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PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICES OPENS BIOSAFETY LEVEL 3 MODULAR LABORATORY ACHIEVED THROUGH COLLABORATIVE VISION AND COMMITMENT

STOCKTON, CA (March 6, 2013) – San Joaquin County Public Health Services (PHS) has opened a Biosafety Level 3 (BSL-3) Modular Laboratory at its Stockton campus. This new laboratory unit significantly enhances the agency's ability to protect the health of the community. Facilities with the designation BSL-3 allow for rapid testing for diseases such as tuberculosis and influenza, and for potentially lethal infectious agents that may be used for bioterrorism such as anthrax and plague. This facility also has the capacity to enable the identification of a wider array of microorganisms and to test larger numbers of specimens.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has established 4 levels of biosafety facility guidelines based on how dangerous an organism is and the level of containment required. The BSL-3 lab is a secure, self-contained unit that uses state-of-the-art technology to maintain a high level of containment and control. BSL-3 facilities prevent contamination using a broad range of techniques and barriers including: tightly controlled and restricted access to facilities, techniques that require safe handling of infectious materials in sealed containers or biosafety cabinets, special clothing and advanced training for BSL-3 laboratory personnel. Acquisition and installation of the BSL-3 facility was made possible primarily through federal public health emergency preparedness grant funds.

The BSL-3 modular laboratory project is the result of a four year collaborative effort with local, state and federal contributions. "We are profoundly grateful for the support and vision of everyone who has helped this project become a reality," said Stephen Willis, Director of the Public Health Services Laboratory.

The BSL-3 laboratory will bring direct and indirect benefits to the surrounding region. In addition to San Joaquin County, the Public Health Services Laboratory serves seven other counties in the region including: Alpine, Amador, Calaveras, Mariposa, Mono, Sierra and Tuolumne.

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Background:

- San Joaquin County Public Health Laboratory is a reference laboratory for the nation-wide Laboratory Response Network (LRN), an integrated network of state and local public health, federal, military and international laboratories that respond to bioterrorism, chemical terrorism, and other public health emergencies. San Joaquin County was one of the three original California county public health laboratories to join the LRN.
- The Laboratory is certified by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) as a select agent laboratory to work with agents (bacterial, viral and toxins) which may cause illness or death in humans or animals. The laboratory officially opened a Biosafety Level 3 Modular Laboratory on February 27, 2013, which is designed to work with these agents, giving the laboratory personnel a safer environment in which to work.
- The modular BSL-3 unit was manufactured, off-site, by GERMFREE (www.germfree.com), a company specializing in bio-containment. On-site installation was completed by Williams Scotsman (www.willscot.com), specialists in modular space. This provided an expedited timeline and enabled completion of the project in just nine months.
- Public Health Laboratories differ from hospital and clinical laboratories as they provide testing in support of communicable disease monitoring and outbreaks. San Joaquin County Public Health Laboratory provided influenza testing during the outbreak in 2009.

Attachments: Photograph by Holly M. Stetson, Public Health Services



Local officials join together to open the Bio-Safety Level 3 (BSL-3) Modular Laboratory at San Joaquin County (SJC) Public Health Services (PHS). (left to right) PHS Director William Mitchell, SJC Board of Supervisors Vice-Chairman Bob Elliott, Stockton Mayor Anthony Silva, SJC Board of Supervisors Chairman Ken Vogel, PHS Lab Director Stephen Willis, SJC Public Health Officer Dr. Karen Furst, PHS Lab Supervising Microbiologist Diane Schultz.