

HealthMap Webinar July 15th, 2010 Q & A

Q. How can I send the results of my HealthMap search to someone? Can I just copy and send the URL for that search?

A. Currently, you cannot just send the URL of your search. The process by which you can share your search is to save your search as a QuickView, and then refer someone to that QuickView. See the next answer of this FAQ for more information about QuickViews.

Q. Is there a way to capture a particular map other than a screen capture?

A. Saving it as a QuickView would capture the map for future use without having to recreate the search. You must be logged in to HealthMap to create a QuickView. In the future you will also be able to access a QuickView via a unique URL.

Q. How do I sign up to receive HealthMap email alerts?

A. Please send an email indicating that you would like to receive these email alerts to info@healthmap.org

Q. I did a search for our county's Paralytic Shellfish Poisoning (PSP) alert from last week, searching for Algae and Washington State for the past month, all sources, and nothing came up, although it could be found in Google News.

A. I'd have to see the original news story to really know, but it may be that the title of the story did not include a word within our specific search criteria (for example: outbreak or epidemic). This is a big reason we appreciate it when HealthMap users add links through the HMCommunity "Outbreak Missing from the Map" feature.

Q. I work for a large health system and we are using this in our Emergency Operations Center. How do partnerships with HealthMap work?

A. Please visit our 'Partners' page to learn more about HealthMap collaborations: <http://healthmap.org/partners/>. In addition, please email us at info@healthmap.org, as we'd be happy to work with you.

Q. Is any of the content archived for a historical review? If so, how far back does it go?

A. We store all of the data in a database that goes back several years. If you are interested in collaborating with us or in accessing our historical data please contact us at info@healthmap.org.

Q. Is the significance ranking more about the relative importance of a disease vs. the validity of the report (ground-truthing type function)?

A. The current plan is to let users self-determine significance (kind of like "Buzzing" or "Digging") to show us what our users think.

Q. Are the emails from HealthMap sent prior to being curated?

A. The daily e-mails are sent regardless of curation. If you have your preferences set to receive an e-mail at 7am, only some of the alerts will likely have been curated. By mid-morning (US East Coast time), a larger portion of the alerts (especially those in English) will have been curated. We are constantly working to improve the system's automated disease and location categorization and its evaluation of what is truly a "breaking" news alert. If your e-mails have been "noisier" than you like, you may want to change your preferences so that you receive e-mails after the curators have started work for the day.

Q. Are there any broader disease groupings for which one can search e.g. "arboviruses"?

A. There are syndrome based "diseases" like gastroenteritis for outbreaks without a diagnosis. Also, we have hemorrhagic fever, meningitis and encephalitis. We don't currently have a category for the arboviride. You can look through the disease list in the Advanced Search and identify diseases of interest to you. Also, to save time in the future, you could make a Quick View so that you would have the ability to quickly view that saved search each time you visited the HealthMap Website.

Q. Are submissions by local public health departments grouped as User Submissions or flagged as from an official public health source?

A. All user submissions currently are grouped within the HMCommunity feed, however sometimes the user name indicates it is from an official source.

Q. Have you planned to allow users to download the data in any way (a web-service API would be great)?

A. Please email us at info@healthmap.org if you are interested in collaborating with us or in using our data.

Q. How often is the information on your map updated?

A. The map displays all of the data in our database in real-time. Our software crawler runs every hour to update our news and official source feeds.

Q. What's the process for validating information received (i.e. are alerts moderated)?

A. It depends on how the report is submitted. If it is a link to a news site, it automatically goes to the map and we edit the location and disease when we review all the other alerts we gather through our system. When someone submits information about his or her own illness a HealthMap staff member reviews it before allowing it to go to the map. We cannot verify each individual case, but when someone reports an outbreak they personally know about we do contact the local public health authority for more information. We add comments to those alerts if we receive additional information from local authorities.

Q. Are reports only for infectious diseases and conditions or do you also accept other types of reports, such as heat-related deaths, etc.

- A. We focus on infectious disease alerts, however we do post some environmental and conflict related warnings that may have the potential to significantly impact public health.

Q. Is it possible to create a custom view map and then embed it on our own web site or blog?

- A. Embedding a map view is currently not supported, but we have been discussing additional ways of allowing users to share map views. This feature may be available in a future release.

Q. I wanted to modify the Gulf of Mexico oil spill map, but cannot find a matching feed or disease category.

- A. We created the category "environmental" for tagging alerts resulting from environmental disasters. The oil spill map displays all alerts where a) the tag is "environmental" and b) the disease location is in the regions directly related to the oil spill. It displays alerts from all English feeds (including HMCommunity submissions). After clicking on the Oil Spill tab, you can then click the "Advanced Search" link in the top bar to see the selections for that view.

Q. Are the case and death count data referring just to that alert or are they a cumulative summary?

- A. Generally the case numbers are cumulative for that outbreak in that location. If you look at the case counts for norovirus at a particular hospital, we'll list numbers for that outbreak. If another outbreak occurs 6 months later, we start over. For H1N1/Swine Flu, we have been using cumulative counts since the start of the pandemic. Now that we are in the second year, we may have to reconsider that, as most stories no longer report cumulative totals.

Q. Is there any way to expand the Alert List window?

- A. Not yet – but it is a feature that we are currently working on and expect to make available in August.

Q. Is there a FAQ or user guide that identifies symbols, functions, etc.? If so, where can it be found?

- A. Yes, there is more detailed map legend information and system details on our "About" page, at <http://healthmap.org/about/>. Also, clicking on the small blue circle with the letter 'i' (located on the main page both next to the Activity Index and QuickView tabs) will open a pop-up box with additional information on those items. While we don't currently have a comprehensive user guide, we hope this webinar will begin to serve that function to some extent.

Q. Is there a feed from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC)?

- A. We are working closely with the CDC on a number of different projects. During the first and second waves of H1N1 infection last year, we relied heavily on the CDC for rapidly updated official reports of H1N1 cases to

inform the HealthMap system. However, other than occasional travel advisories, CDC does not currently generate a publicly available feed of real-time outbreak information that we can import into our system.

Q. Is there a way to determine whether an outbreak on the map has any journal publication associated with it and if so, how would you link up the map and the publication link?

A. Due to the time gap between news stories on an outbreak and the later publication on those outbreaks in journals, citation information is not available at the time we receive the alerts. We do not currently have a mechanism to automatically add publication information to alerts from several weeks to years ago.

Q. As you begin developing case counts and mortality data will you exclude or include any particular sources?

A. Currently, we are simply using these fields as a way for curators to extract additional information from the articles to a) enhance the user experience and ability to gauge magnitude of outbreaks, and b) provide data for later analysis. Inclusion and exclusion criteria will be evaluated for any subsequent analysis.

Q. Is it possible to add newsfeeds that might be specific to a geographic region?

A. The functionality for users to add data feeds is not supported at this time. However, if you are aware of a news feed that might provide more specific and timely coverage to an area please let us know by emailing us at info@healthmap.org.

Q. Could you describe a little more about the pins on the map and what level of resolution can be obtained from the specific location?

A. Two types of markers are used on the map. Spheres are used mainly for countrywide alerts, and pins are used for anything more specific. When you click on the marker, the location is listed in the bubble that opens. There you can see if the alert has been flagged as a state, a city, or even a specific elementary school or military installation. The automated system chooses the country, state, or large city it thinks is most appropriate for each alert. Curators add specific locations such as schools manually as the alerts are reviewed each day.

Q. Is there a way to flag negative reports?

A. HealthMap users can provide feedback about reports either using the significance-rating feature, or via the comments tool.

Q. What filters are used for Google News?

A. The query parameters that we pass to Google News differs for every language and is constantly being tweaked in the effort to retrieve the most relevant, breaking news about disease outbreaks. If you have any

feedback or suggestions, please contact us at info@healthmap.org.

Q. Is there any kind of alert that can be put up to recognize a specific disease as it is added?

A. Users signed up to receive HealthMap email alerts are able to customize these emails to receive only alerts of interest. For example, a user may choose to receive only alerts from English-language news feeds, from all geographic locations, but for only Yellow Fever. These email alerts can be received as frequently as once per hour. If you would like to receive HealthMap email alerts please email us at info@healthmap.org.

Q. Is there a way to search specifically within HealthMap for human or animal health alerts?

A. Functionality to perform that type of search is currently not supported. We do report on a wide range of infectious diseases however, to include many zoonoses.