

# Guiding Local Preparedness Coordinators: Online Training and Mentoring

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## Background

Preparedness coordinators (PCs) are responsible for improving the capacity of their local health department to plan for and respond to public health emergencies. In North Carolina, there is no standardized training for the PC position and many PCs do not have a background in preparedness when they begin the job. The specific responsibilities of local PCs vary by health department.

## Curriculum Development

To address this gap, nurses from North Carolina's 7 Public Health Regional Surveillance Teams collaborated with the North Carolina Center for Public Health Preparedness at the University of North Carolina Gillings School of Global Public Health to develop and pilot an online training course for PCs.

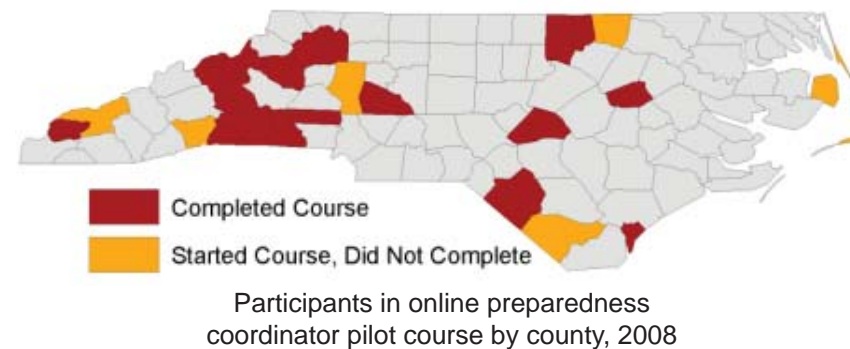
The competency-based course provides an overview of the PC role and responsibilities and offers a forum for PCs to share experiences. The 8-week course features online lectures, activities, and interactive discussion boards for the 6 modules. To promote exchange of lessons learned, veteran PCs from each region serve as mentors for course participants by moderating discussion boards and answering questions via e-mail or telephone.



Screen shot of preparedness coordinator online course

## Pilot Course Implementation

A pilot course was offered August 4-September 27, 2008. Pilot participants were recruited via an e-mail letter to a sample of PCs selected to represent a range of previous experience and diverse regions of the state. Twenty-one PCs registered for the course; 14 completed it.



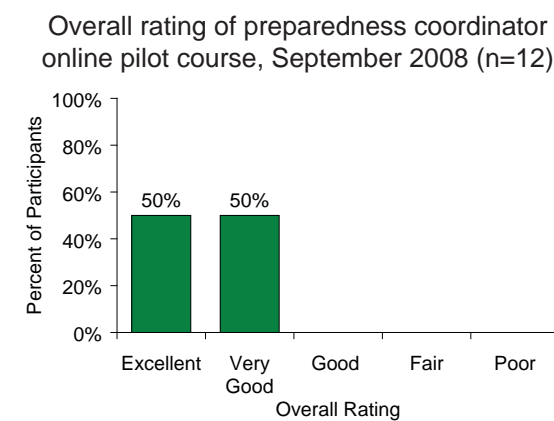
The course was structured as follows:

- 1. Orientation conference call**  
Instructors introduced participants to the course structure, content, and online instructional system.
- 2. One module per week (6 weeks)**  
Course administrators sent an e-mail introducing the module. Each module included lecture, activities, and online mentor-moderated discussion.
- 3. One catch-up week after Module 4**
- 4. Final project**  
Participants used the Master the Disaster! interactive exercise-building tool to create an emergency preparedness tabletop exercise that will be used in their county or health district.

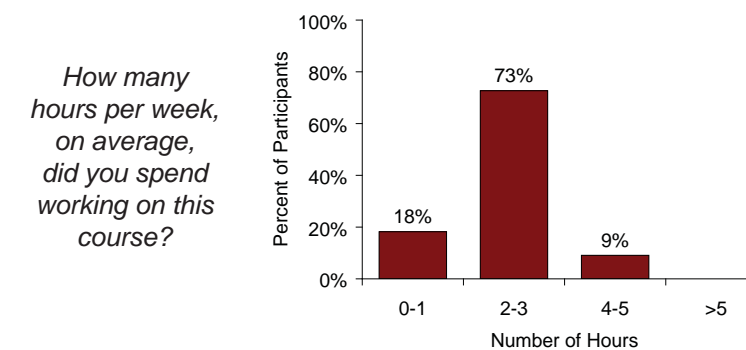
## Evaluation

Of the 14 participants who completed the course, 12 (86%) submitted a post-course evaluation.

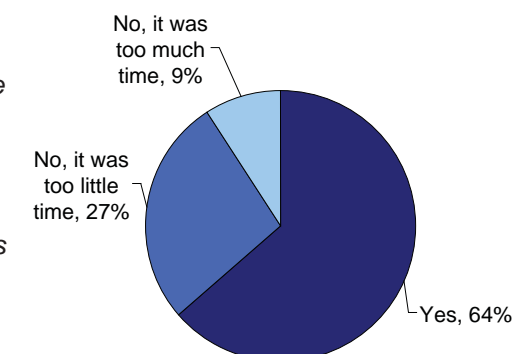
All participants rated the course favorably and 100% would recommend the course to other PCs. Participants felt the course mentors were very important (50%; n=5) or somewhat important (50%; n=5) to the course overall.



Amount of time spent on preparedness coordinator online pilot course, August-September 2008



Did you feel the time you spent working on the course each week was appropriate based on your expectations of the course?



## Comments from Course Participants

"[This course] gives very good introductory information and lays a good foundation; I have gained a lot of knowledge that I did not have and I have been doing this job since 2002."

"When I started a little over a year ago, my agency did not have an instruction manual for new PCs. This online course gives PCs a better understanding of what they need to be doing."

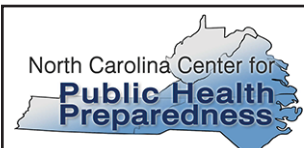
"The class is excellent...I haven't had time to participate in the discussion boards but the lectures and course materials have been very informative!"

"I thought that the course was very helpful in explaining all of the duties that being a PC entails. I actually wished that those who supervise the PC position would take the class as well so that they could better understand what being a PC means."

## Lessons Learned

Lessons learned from the pilot of the PC course include the following:

- The course was relevant to the PC job and filled an essential training need. Both new and veteran PCs found the training timely, relevant and essential in fulfilling the role of PC.
- The mentoring component can be expanded and pilot mentors would have been willing to spend more time in their mentoring role. Pilot course participants suggested having mentors make personal phone calls to each participant at the start of the course.
- There is a need for guidance to mentors and other online discussion board moderators. A brief tip sheet was developed at the end of the pilot course to share with mentors in the next offering of the course.
- Course participants expressed a desire for other local health department staff, including health directors, to have access to course lectures online.



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