The U.S.-México Border Health Commission’s (BHC) infectious disease initiative evolved from a series of events and actions that reflect back to the BHC’s concept plan for the Early Warning Infectious Disease Surveillance (EWIDS) program, presented to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) in 2003 and funded in 2004 along both southern and northern borders.

Because infectious disease and public health emergency preparedness are BHC priorities, the Commission is committed (and thereby OGA/OS) to provide a venue for discussion and action on these matters. In November 2006, the BHC convened the first-ever "binational federal-state" forum on avian influenza in Hermosillo, Sonora, México. This forum was followed by another first-ever binational table-top exercise on avian influenza in February, 2007 in San Diego, California, with a case study involving an imported avian case to Tijuana, Baja California, Mexico. This was the very first area of the United States where the impact of pandemic H1N1 influenza was first recognized a few years later.

The purpose of the U.S.-México Border Binational Infectious Disease Conference is to convene federal, state, and local partners from both sides of the U.S.-México border to address critical infectious disease and emergency preparedness issues impacting the border region and discuss potential solutions to address those problems. The Commission provides a venue for these discussions and actions while supporting the U.S. and Mexico national strategies impacting the work along the border.

Areas of concern with respect to improving binational public health emergency response are cross-border and global partnerships, global health security, and international dialogues on biological threats. The conference can serve to address these strategic objectives through encouraging local, state, and federal partners to participate in the following activities:

- Enhance processes for sharing epidemiological information across the border by Sharing epidemiological information (routine epidemiological data as well as details on binational cases and outbreaks)
- Improve protocols for immediate notification across borders when needed by—
  - Clarifying how to assess whether the situation requires immediate notification
  - Maintaining updated contact directories
  - Testing/exercising after-hours contact
- Improve electronic information sharing capabilities to allow for more rapid and secure exchange of information
- Establish or enhance regional surveillance networks that include binational components when possible
- Encourage the conduct of joint binational training and exercises related to surveillance, epidemiology, and preparedness
- Assess the impact of migration on health systems throughout the two countries and consider lessons learned from nonborder states

During the 2011 conference, work groups will convene to discuss these critical issues and potential solutions.