

# UNMC project shortens patients' wait for diagnoses

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Some rural communities will no longer have to wait days to hear back from bigger health labs about research on microscopic specimens.

The University of Nebraska Medical Center unveiled a new emergency response system for public health laboratories called STATPack, which makes it easier for smaller communities' research labs to contact larger ones.

STATPack, which is short for Secure Telecommunication Application Terminal Package, will securely transmit macroscopic and microscopic laboratory specimen images through digital or electronic means, said Ann Fruhling, an assistant professor of information systems at the University of Nebraska at Omaha.

"If there is an emergency subject matter, experts are alerted immediately," she said.

Those subject matters could include anything from the West Nile Virus to bioterrorism.

STATPack also provides an airtight container for diagnosing specimen, which creates safer handling of biohazardous specimen, according to the project's Web site, [www.statpack.org](http://www.statpack.org).

The project started in 2002, Fruhling said. An important feature is its affordability for public health laboratories, she said.

Three people currently work full-time on the research project, but during the last four years, more than a dozen University of Nebraska students have worked on it, she said.

The project began from a Nebraska Research Initiative, Fruhling said, and then funding was awarded to researchers from the university system.

There is still a patent pending on the project, but Fruhling said it could bring economic value to Nebraska.

Beth Buehler, a sophomore biochemistry major at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, said the program would save time, especially when people are trying to compile research.

"It'll help with advancements in new technologies and studying diseases," she said.

Buehler said the STATPack could increase people's respect of UNMC and might bring new students and researchers to Nebraska.

The project has value in terms of education, Fruhling said.

It "offers incredible opportunities for students to learn cutting-edge information technology," she said, and it provides multiple research opportunities for students.

"It is a system that will improve the health care quality of life for Nebraskans and also citizens throughout the nation," she said.