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Lab-Sharing System Demonstrated

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Researchers demonstrated a video microscopy system Thursday at the University of Nebraska Medical Center that could allow pathologists across the state to consult with each other on biopsies of patients' cells.

They also showed how 10 laboratories statewide can share images of organisms in a lab dish, consult to identify them and alert other health officials if there's a potential problem.

Both technologies are part of the state's efforts to fight bioterrorism, a looming concern since the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

Gov. Dave Heineman, who was on hand for the demonstrations, also discussed Nebraska's growing stature in bioterrorism preparedness.

Heineman has led the state's bioterrorism preparedness efforts since the 9/11 attacks.

Another part of those efforts, a new 10-bed biocontainment unit at the Nebraska Medical Center, was visited last month by Dr. Julie Gerberding, director of the national Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Using the microscopy system, pathologists can zoom in remotely to view slides up close. They can even circle areas of concern and exchange notes, using the accompanying computer software.

A whistle blows when an urgent message comes in. Consultations are conducted over a secure telecommunications network. Improved communication is another of the keys to preparedness that Heineman discussed.

The second technology is part of the Secure Telecommunications Application Terminal Package, or STATPack, an emergency response system intended to help laboratories prepare for potential bioterrorism or public health emergencies.

The STATPack project is a joint effort among the medical center, the University of Nebraska at Omaha and the Nebraska Public Health Laboratory.

"This is Nebraska technology," said Dr. Steven Hinrichs, director of the medical center's bioterrorism efforts. "We hope we can spin it off."

Heineman also noted a variety of other bioterrorism efforts under way across the state -- and beyond.

Nebraska, he said, is expanding its efforts to a 10-state mutual aid alliance, which Nebraska will lead.

In Nebraska, the state has deployed 29 decontamination trailers, conducted 60 agricultural emergency planning sessions and trained truck drivers to spot suspicious activity.