

HANDBOOK

# EpiCore Training

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IN PARTNERSHIP WITH

# INTRO

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This handbook will explain key concepts of EpiCore and provide you with step-by-step instructions on how to use the EpiCore system.

By the end of this handbook, you should feel comfortable using EpiCore and applying your knowledge and expertise to this innovative global surveillance system.

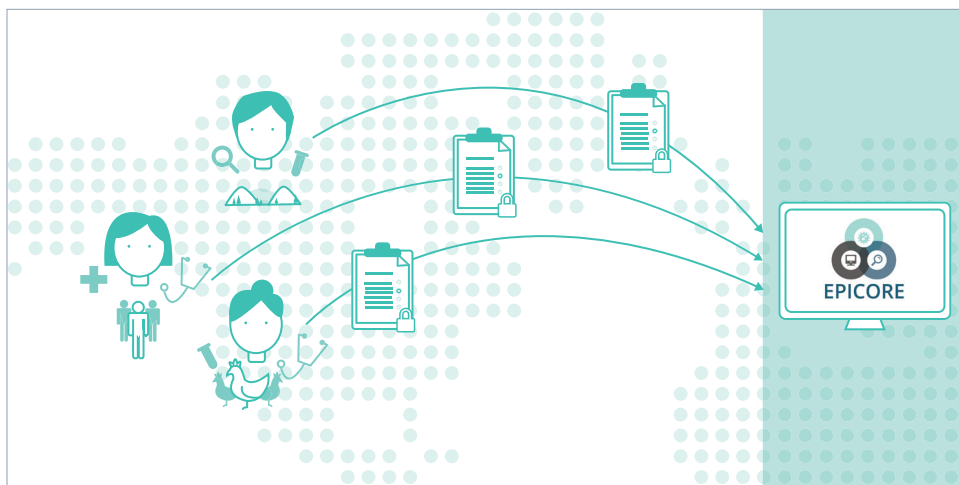
## **Upon completion of this course you will be able to:**

- Describe what EpiCore is and how ProMED is related to EpiCore;
- Explain why you should become an EpiCore member and what you will gain from it;
- Describe a Request for Information and explain how to respond to one; and
- Describe how to use EpiCore.

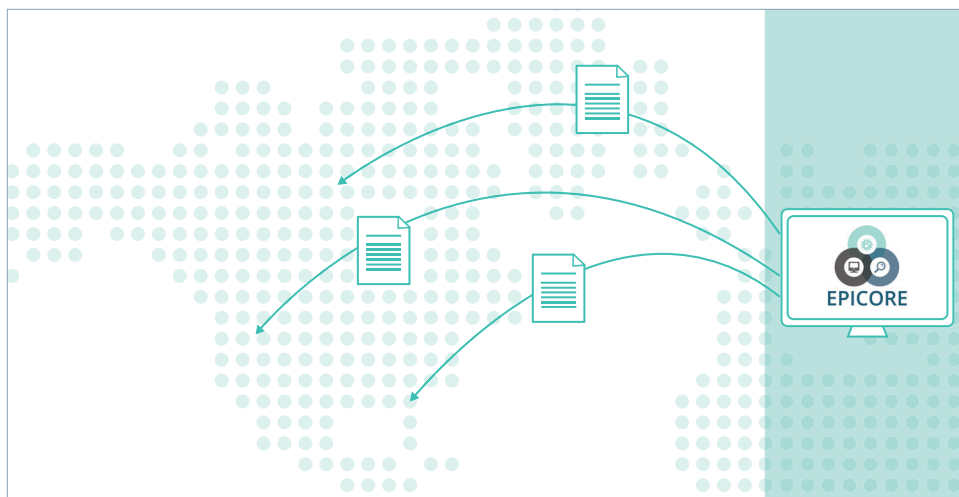
# WHAT IS EPICORE?

EpiCore is a new system that finds and reports outbreaks faster than traditional disease surveillance methods alone.

EpiCore draws on the knowledge of a global community of human, animal and environmental health professionals to verify information on disease outbreaks in their geographic regions, and connects them with a secure online networking and reporting system.



By using innovative surveillance techniques and linking local and international health experts, EpiCore enables faster global outbreak detection and reporting.



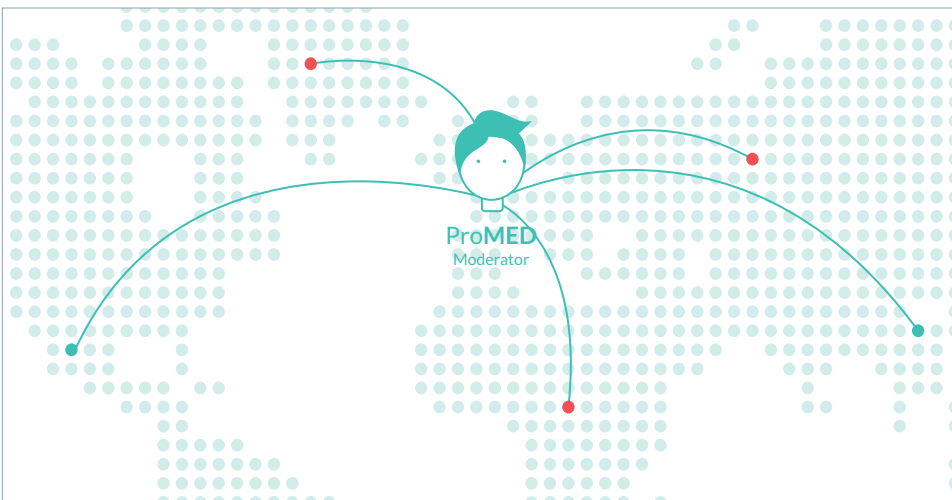
## EpiCore Communication

What is EpiCore?

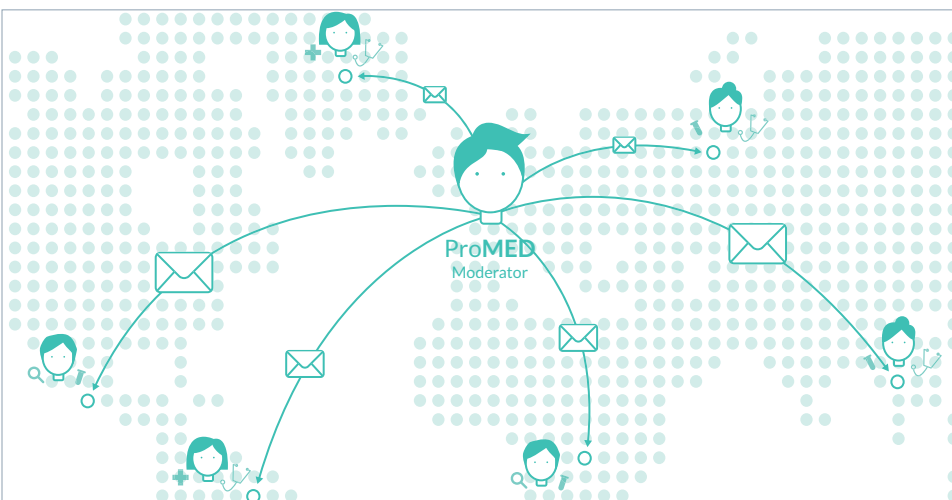
Communication on EpiCore is facilitated by what are called “Requests For Information”, or RFIs for short.



Experts at ProMED-mail, which we introduced in the first module, look for leads regarding possible outbreaks around the world.

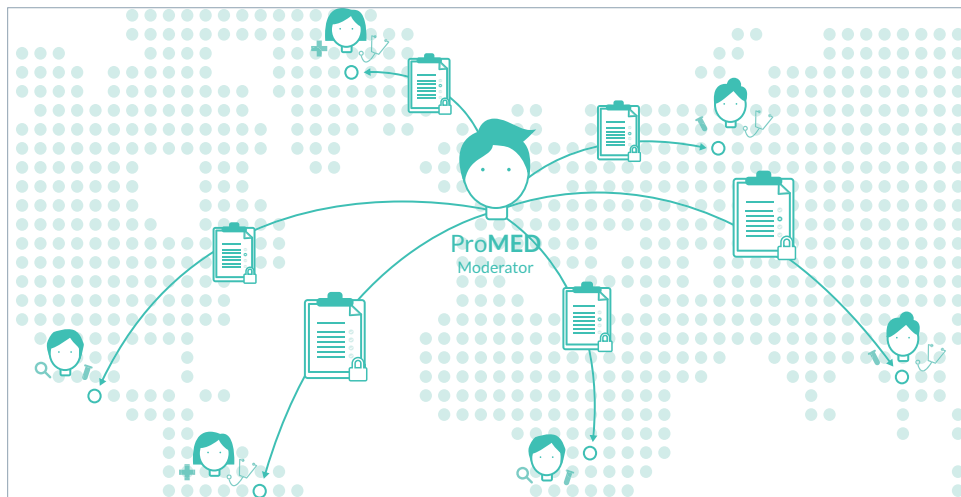


When evidence of an outbreak is found, ProMED-mail experts send an RFI to request verification from EpiCore members in that geographic region.

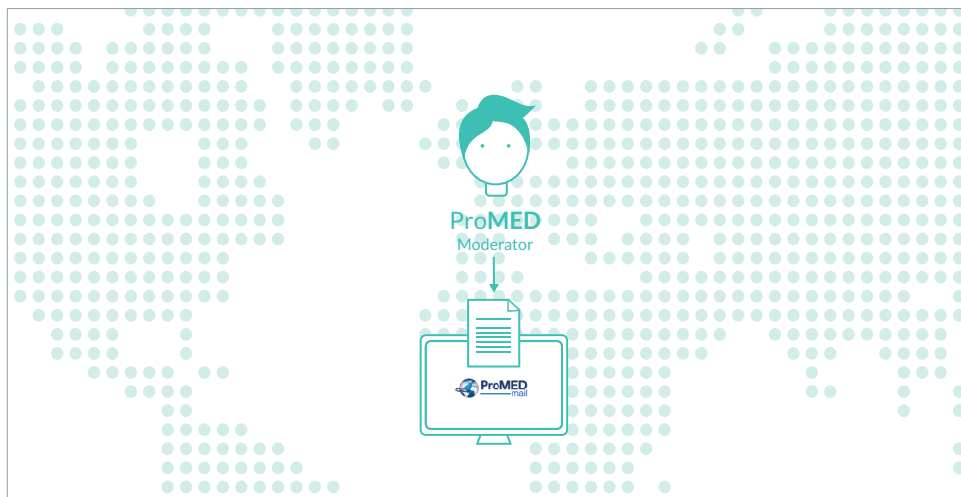


Through a secure online platform, members are able to easily and quickly provide local expertise which speeds outbreak verification.

What is EpiCore?

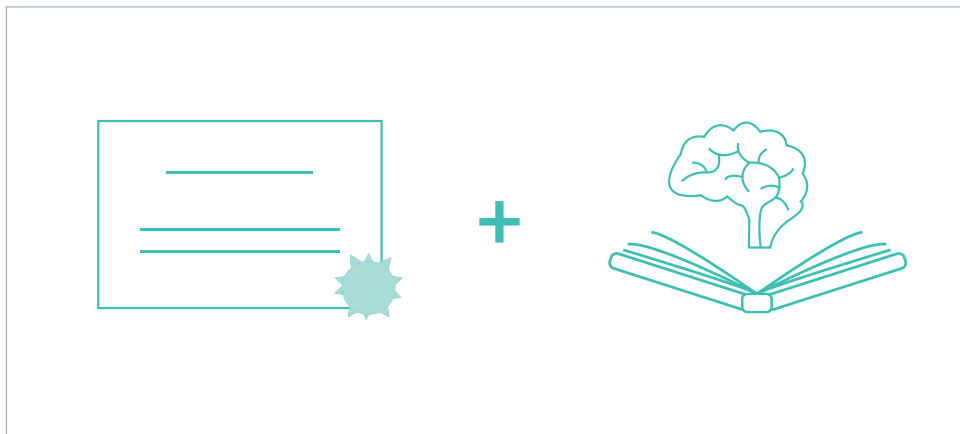


The information collected through EpiCore is then shared on ProMED-mail, which is a free, nonpolitical system that has an open and public worldwide distribution. We will expand more on RFIs and ProMED later in this module.



## Member Credentials and Qualifications

What is EpiCore?



EpiCore members must have certain credentials. These include a degree in the human or animal health fields, which could be human or veterinary medicine, nursing, microbiology, or a similarly relevant field, plus a knowledge of the basic principles of epidemiology, infectious disease, and/or related fields.

All EpiCore members must have at least 2 of the following qualifications:

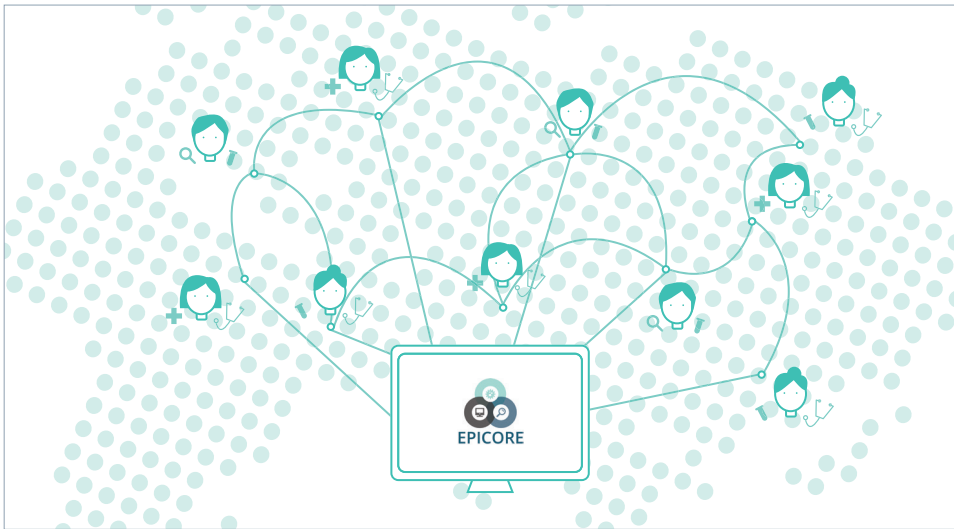
- An advanced degree in Public Health or a related field (e.g. MPH)
- Health professional certification or licensure (e.g. MD, DVM, RN)
- At least 3 years of experience in human or animal health
- Current affiliation with a medical center, university, Ministry of Health, Department of Health, or other health-related organization including NGOs & private sector organizations
- Successful completion of a Field Epidemiology Training Program

# WHY SHOULD YOU BECOME AN EPICORE MEMBER?

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Let us start by mentioning that only qualified and experienced health professionals are selected. As a member, you will be part of an exclusive and elite cohort.

The benefits of participating are numerous and vary in magnitude by country and region. For example, for some countries that do not have a comprehensive disease surveillance system in place, EpiCore helps health professionals in one area or sector to be aware of any outbreaks in other areas or sectors of the country.



Additionally, some countries do not regularly or consistently share surveillance information with neighboring countries due to linguistic, cultural, or even political barriers, barriers which do not stop pathogens from crossing borders. EpiCore helps health officials and professionals in these countries learn about potential outbreaks in nearby locations. This information can help them initiate life-saving prevention and control measures.

In our globalized world, it can even be beneficial to know about outbreaks thousands of miles away so health officials around the world can appropriately prepare to receive travelers from affected countries and monitor new cases.

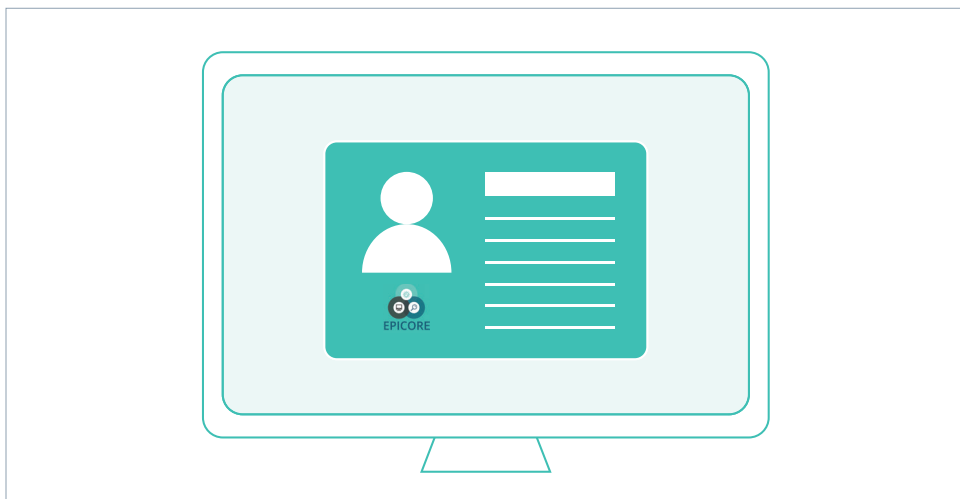
It will also help you, as an EpiCore member, to make sure that the correct information about potential outbreaks in your country is shared with the rest of the world.

Why should you become an active EpiCore member?



If, for example, you received a request that you know has inaccurate or irrelevant information or is based on a false rumor, you can help make sure that the correct information is being disseminated.

The key is that increased reporting improves our knowledge of what is going on around us. This helps us **all** to be more prepared.



EpiCore members can help protect people in their communities, countries, regions and across the globe. Your participation in EpiCore is critical in helping to prevent or even stop epidemics and save lives. By becoming an EpiCore member, you will help change the landscape of disease surveillance! All EpiCore asks from members in return is simply your knowledge and **a very small amount of your time!** For our members, EpiCore truly embodies a “small commitment, big impact” approach.



# RFIs AND THE PROMED MODERATORS

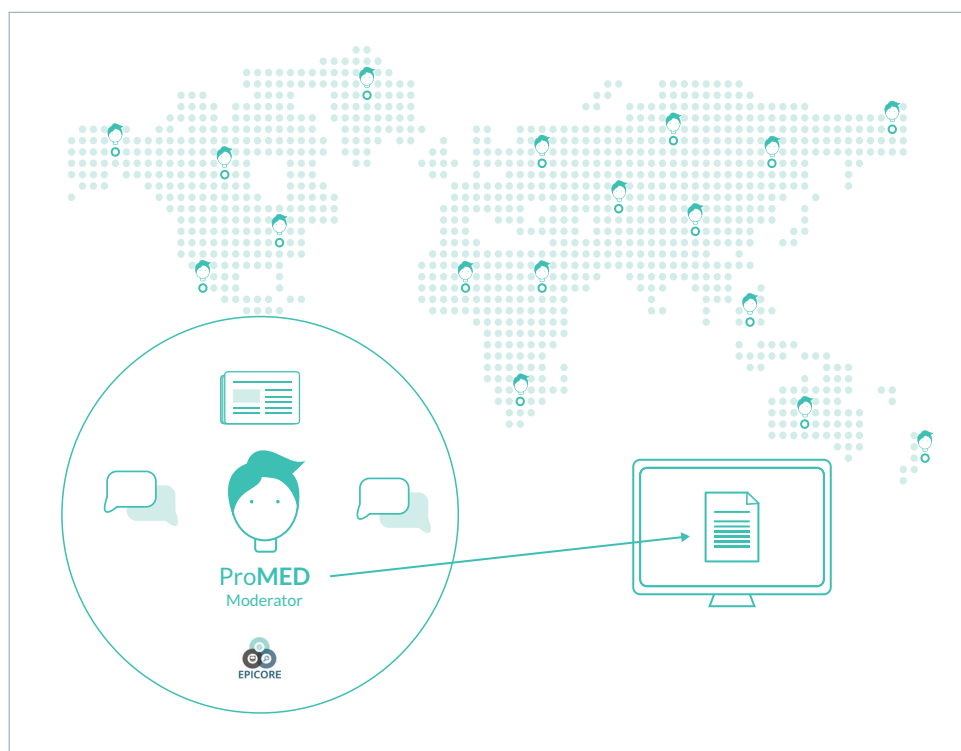
## RFIs

Previously, we mentioned the requests for information (or RFIs) that will be sent via the EpiCore system to members. Next, we will explain where RFIs come from, and the purpose they serve as part of EpiCore.

## Moderators

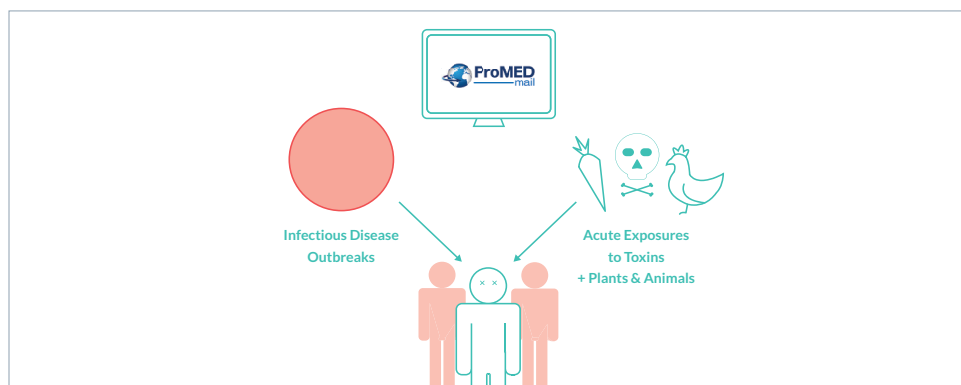
As we mentioned earlier, RFIs are sent by a group of experts from ProMED-mail. These experts are carefully selected infectious disease specialists based around the world. They are trained to recognize possible outbreaks of public health significance.

They continuously monitor nontraditional information sources and publish reports on emerging and re-emerging diseases from all over the world.



## ProMED

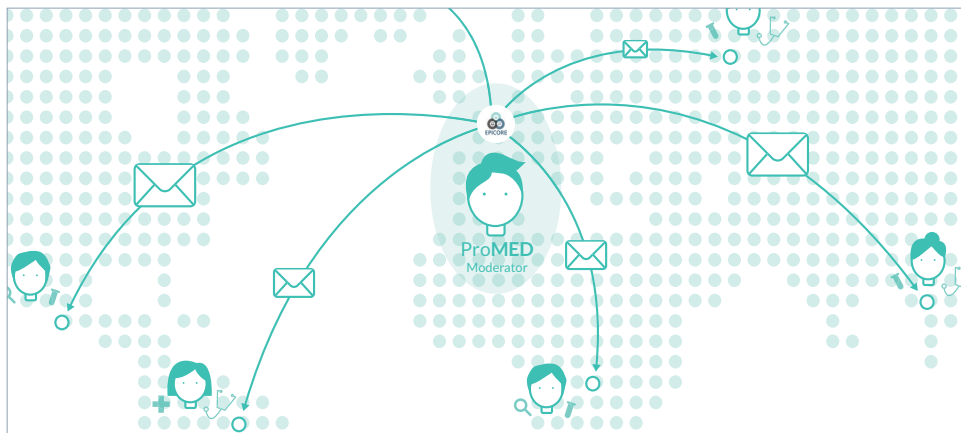
ProMED-mail, or simply ProMED, is an internet-based reporting system that is dedicated to the rapid, global dissemination of information on infectious diseases outbreaks and acute exposures to toxins that affect human health, including those in plants and animals that are grown for human consumption.



ProMED's reports are published online and include expert commentary. These reports are accessible on the ProMED website and are sent by email to its continually growing list of 80,000 subscribers.

## Conclusion

To summarize, RFIs are the method of communication used by EpiCore and are sent to EpiCore members by the ProMED.



You can respond to any RFI you receive to correct or fill in missing, vital information – or to verify outbreak information received from an informal source.

The information or verification you are able to provide means that more accurate news of this potential outbreak will reach those who need it more quickly, and could help the affected area avoid an epidemic.

### LINKS TO EXPLORE

Explore the ProMED website and, while on the site, try to find a post about your country or a neighboring country.

[[www.promedmail.org](http://www.promedmail.org)]

Here is a link you can use to know more about moderators

[<http://www.promedmail.org/aboutus/whoswho/>]

Did you find a report about your country or a neighboring country?

Now imagine a similar post on a possible outbreak in your country or region, only it is missing vital information or simply has incorrect information! This is when you get a chance to verify outbreak information.

### QUESTION

True or False:

ProMED is free of charge, open to everyone and is non-political.

## Information you should provide in an RFI

Here are some examples of the types of information that can be used in an RFI response:

Information on **PERSON**, such as:

- Demographics (age, gender, etc.)
- Case numbers
- Fatalities
- Lab results
- Diagnosis
- Pathogen(s)
- Supporting information

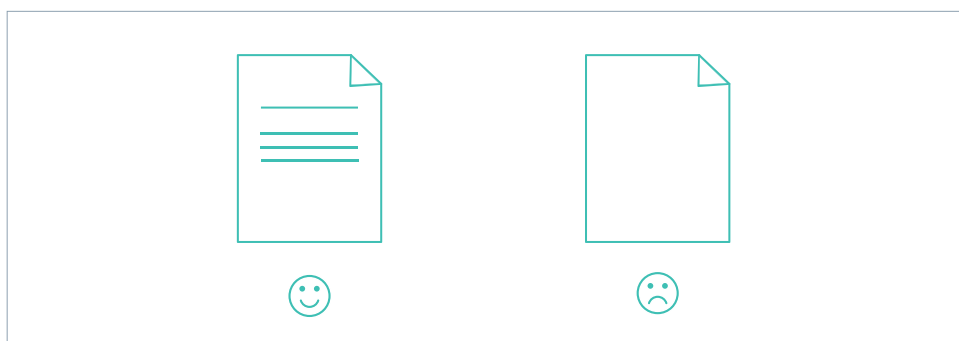
Information on **PLACE**, such as:

- the location of patient(s)

And information on **TIME**, such as:

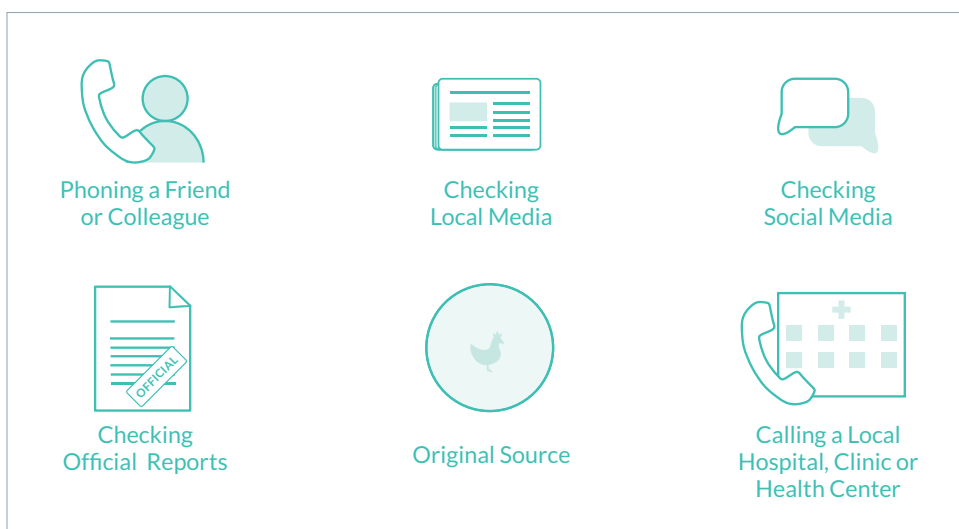
- the date of occurrence(s)

Remember! Some information is better than no information!

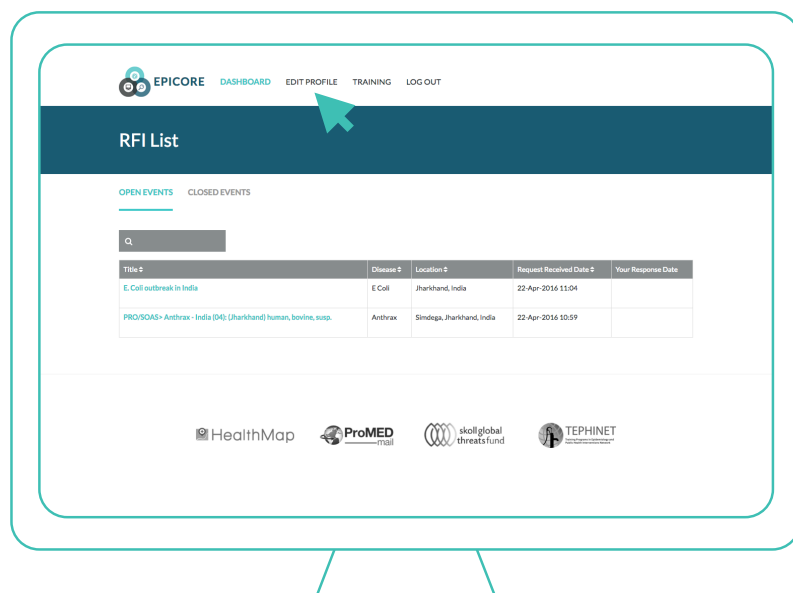


You might already know the information you want to use in your response, but you may also decide to gather or reinforce your information by:

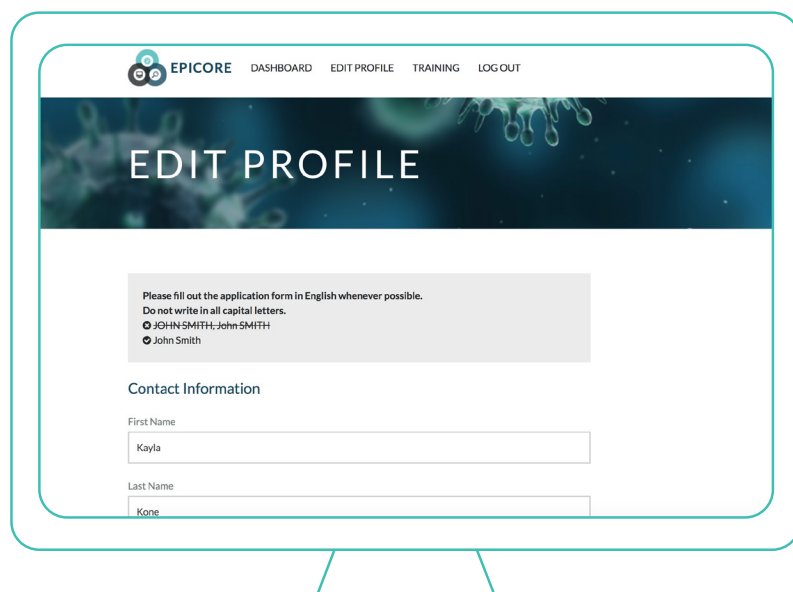
- Phoning a friend or a colleague
- Checking local media, like newspapers, radio, TV, etc.
- Checking social media in your local language or in your country for any trends on the disease or symptoms
- Checking official reports
- Going back to the original source
- Calling a local hospital, clinic, or health center



# HOW TO USE THE EPICORE PLATFORM



The first thing we wanted to point out is that you can always edit your EpiCore personal profile by clicking the "Edit Profile" tab here. ➡

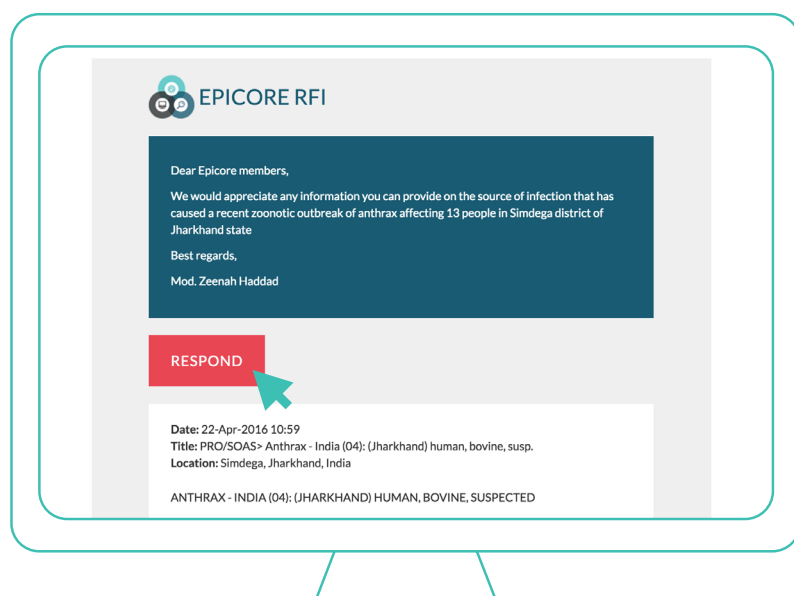


This feature will enable you to change any of the information you submitted on your original EpiCore application, including the email address where you prefer to receive EpiCore communication, the country of residence, your education and work information.

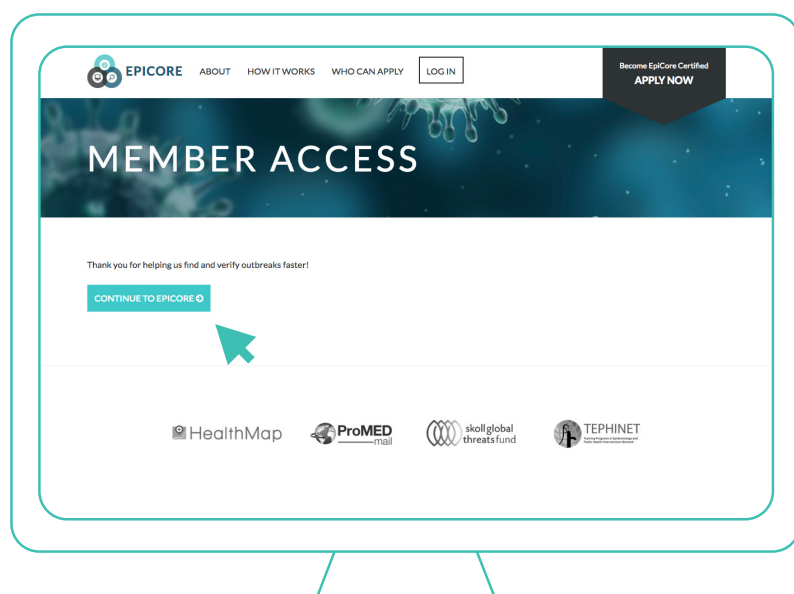
As soon as you become a certified EpiCore member, you'll start receiving RFIs via email. To ensure that our emails make it to your inbox and are not filtered into your "junk" or "bulk" folder, please add **MOD@EPICORE.ORG** to your list of trusted senders.

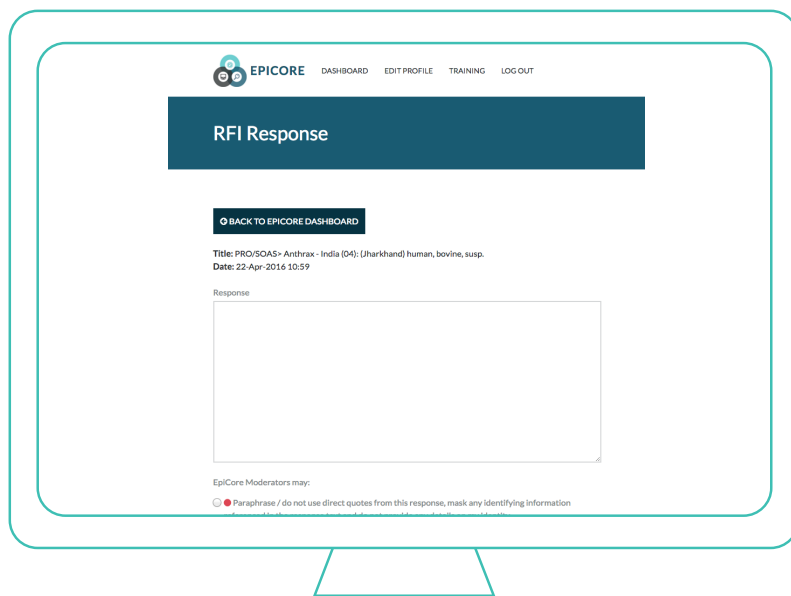
Here is an example of an email sending you an RFI. To respond, click on "RESPOND".

Note that mod@epicore.org is a no-reply email, as such if you attempt to reply to the email directly, your email will not be delivered to the moderator.

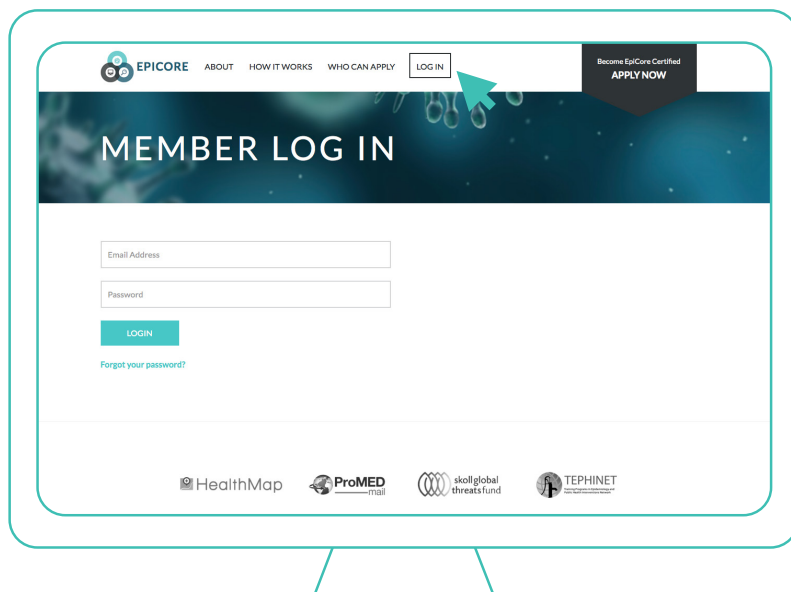


Then click on "Continue to EpiCore".



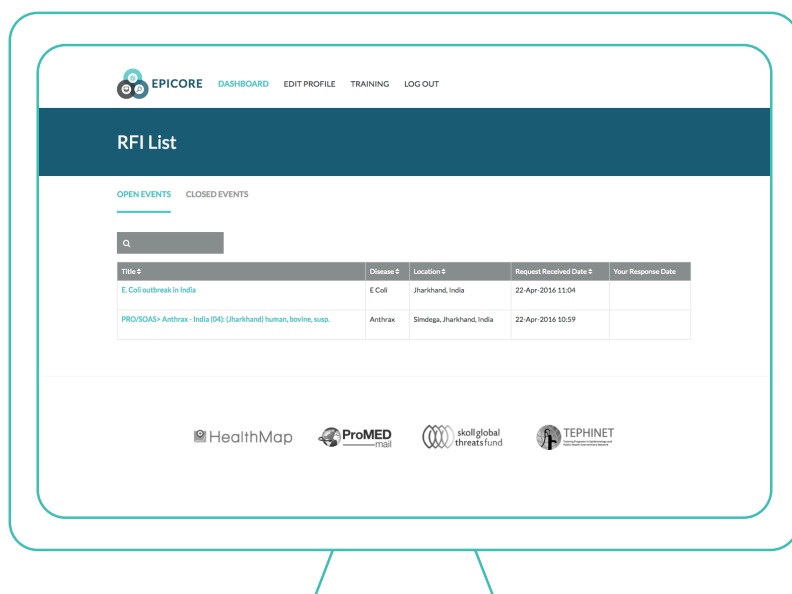


You will be directed to the response page for that RFI where you will see the text box ready for you to type in your response.



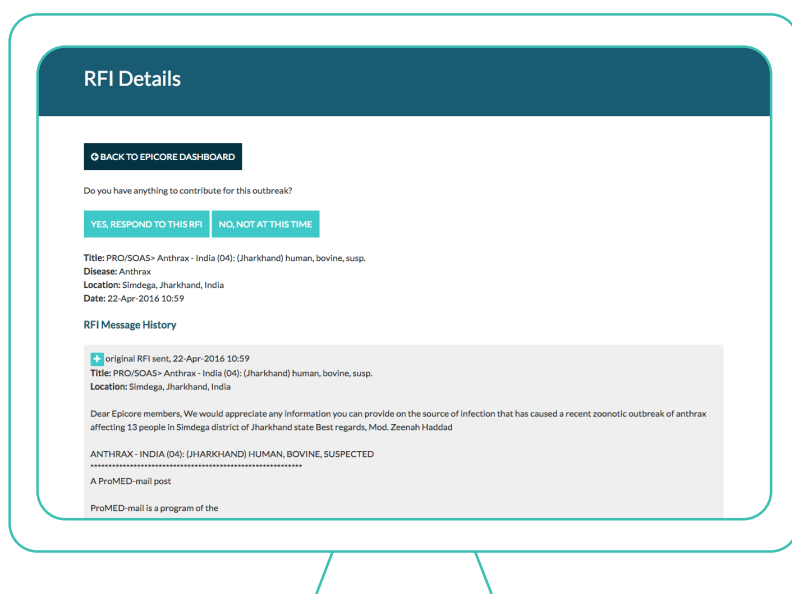
There is also an option of going to EpiCore's website directly to view and respond to the RFI separate from the email link.

Go to [www.epicore.org](http://www.epicore.org) 



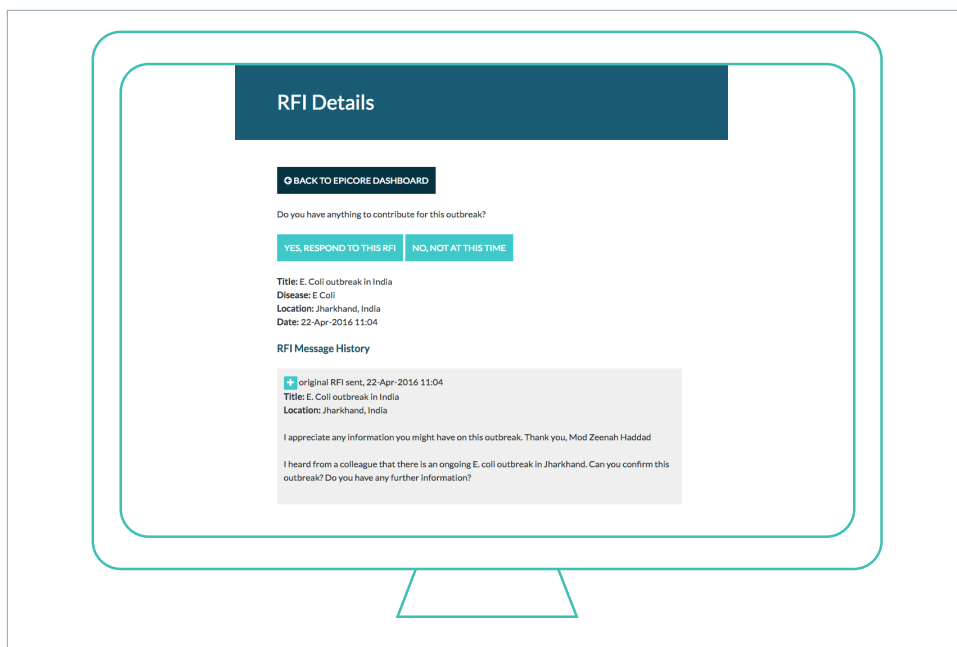
Once you log into the EpiCore website, you will be directed to your dashboard, which will look like this, where you will see all of the open RFIs you have received listed here.

It is important to note that RFIs can vary in content. They could be long or short, depending on the amount of information the moderator has on the rumored outbreak. So the RFI could look like anything between a full ProMED post to a simple one-sentence question.

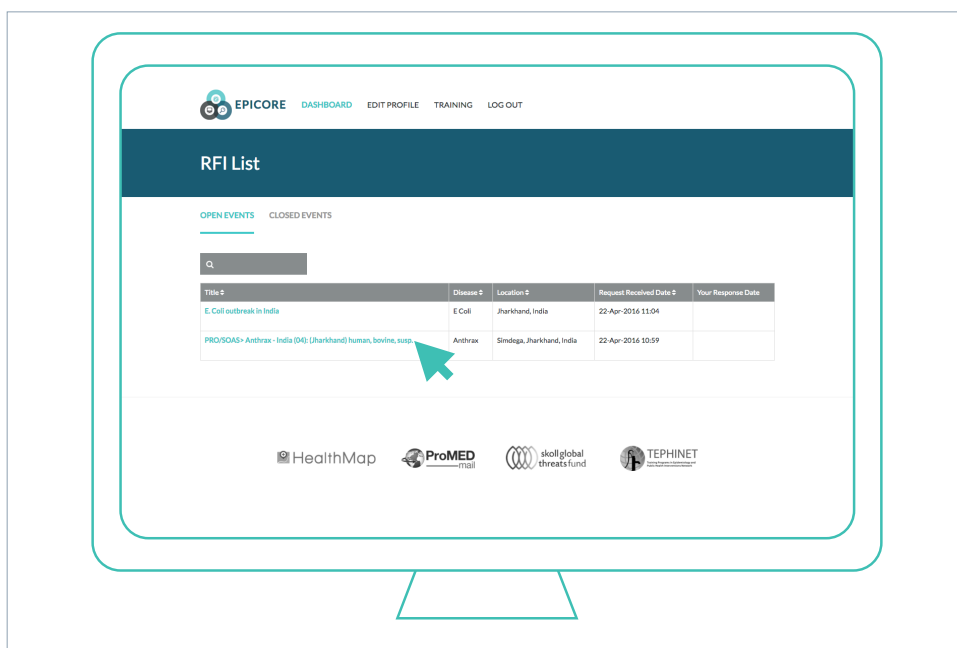


This is an example of an RFI that includes a full ProMED post with a specific question. This type of RFI provides all the information the moderator could find on the rumored outbreak, including the source of the information and a list of any other similar outbreaks in the country or region.

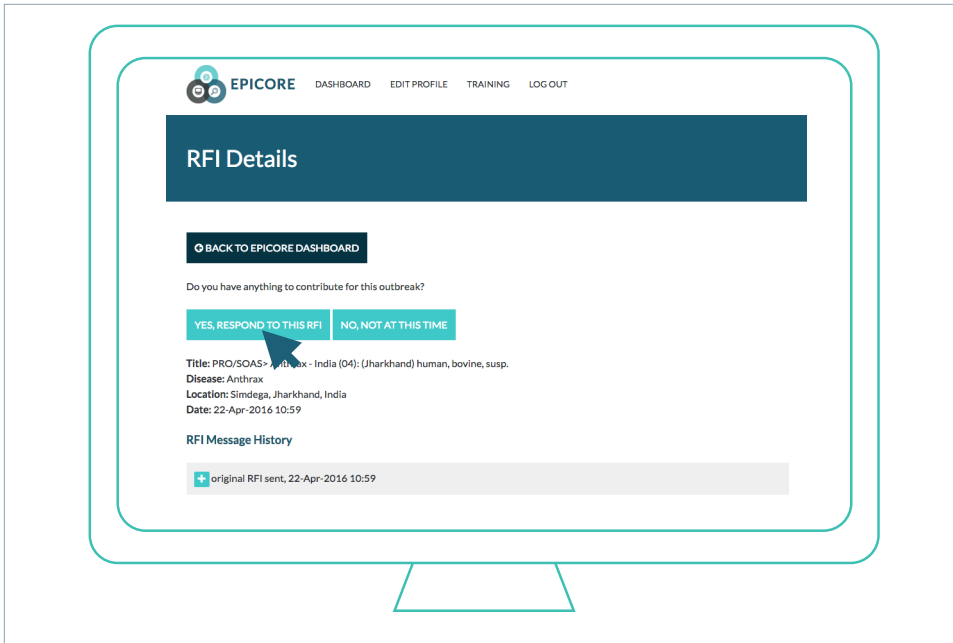




This is an example of an RFI with a simple question from the moderator. This type of RFI would not typically have ample information on the source of the rumored outbreak, for example, “I heard from a colleague in your country that there is an E. coli outbreak in Jharkhand. Can you confirm this outbreak?”

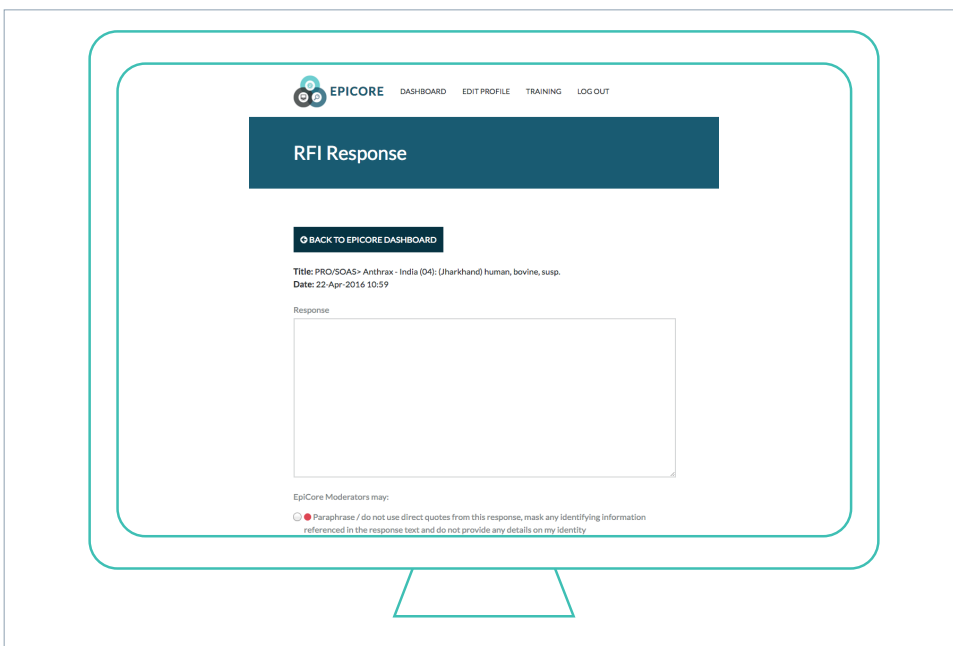


Let’s go ahead and respond to one of those RFIs. Previously, we discussed how you can respond to an RFI by clicking on the link on your email. We also mentioned that you can also respond to an RFI directly from your EpiCore dashboard. To do so, click on the RFI you would like to respond to. ➡



Once you click on the RFI, you will be asked if you have any information to contribute regarding the suspected outbreak.

If you do have information on an outbreak, click on “Yes, respond to this RFI”. ➡



You will be directed to a page with a text box in which you can type your response. This is the same page you would have been directed to if you clicked on the email link to respond.

When you respond, **your identity is always masked**, which means moderators will not know who you are unless you choose to reveal that information when you submit your response.

***After filling out your response, you will then need to select your permission level for moderators to use your response in a public post. We have created options here to help you communicate to the moderator the permission level you prefer.***

[BACK TO EPICORE DASHBOARD](#)

Title: PRO/SOAS- Anthrax - India [D4]: (Jharkhand) human, bovine, susp.  
Date: 22-Apr-2016 10:59

Response

The villagers said they consumed a dead cattle, suspected to have been killed by the disease, on Saturday night and developed blisters, stomach disorder and passed blood in stool. However, it was not clear whether the villagers had consumed cow or buffalo meat. Though cow slaughter is banned in Jharkhand, villagers often consume the meat of dead cattle. Samples of blood and body fluid from the affected people have been sent to the Rajendra Institutes of Medical Sciences (RIMS) for confirmation of anthrax. As per investigation report by the Jharkhand Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme (IDSP), the villagers developed symptoms of suspected anthrax within 48 hours of consuming the meat.

Anita Kaleka  
Clinical Laboratory Scientist at the Sadar Hospital

EpiCore Moderators may:

- ☐ Paraphrase / do not use direct quotes from this response, mask any identifying information referenced in the response text and do not provide any details on my identity
- ☐ Quote this response but mask any identifying information referenced in the response text and do not provide any details on my identity
- ☒ Quote this response and attribute it to me

Enter your name, title, organization etc.

[SUBMIT](#)

You can choose to ask the moderator to directly quote your response and attribute it to you when including it in the public ProMED post.

If you choose this option, you will be prompted to enter your name and title as you would like them to appear in a public post since they would not be revealed to the moderator in any other way.

This option is marked with a green circle on the site. ●

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[SUBMIT](#)

If you want to give the moderator permission to quote your response but would like them to mask any identifying information referenced in the response text or any details you might provide on your identity, you would choose this option. ➤

***“Quote this response but mask any identifying information referenced in the response text and do not provide any details on my identity”***

It is advisable that you point out any information you want them to mask.

This option is marked with a yellow circle on the site. ●

[BACK TO EPICORE DASHBOARD](#)

Title: PRO/SOAS- Anthrax - India (04): (Jharkhand) human, bovine, susp.  
Date: 22-Apr-2016 10:59

Response

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- ☐ Quote this response and attribute it to me

[SUBMIT](#)

Or, you can request that the moderator paraphrase your response entirely to avoid using any words or phrases that can inadvertently help reveal your identity to the readers. ➡

***“Paraphrase/do not use direct quotes from this response, mask any identifying information referenced in the response text and do not provide any details on my identity.”***

This option is marked with a red circle on the site. ●

[BACK TO EPICORE DASHBOARD](#)

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Date: 22-Apr-2016 10:59

Response

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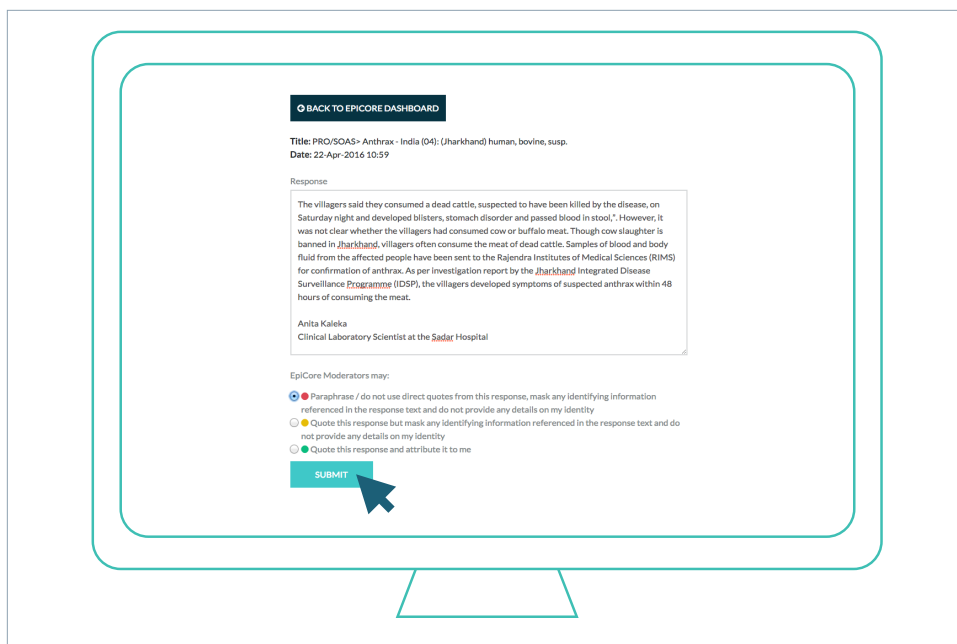
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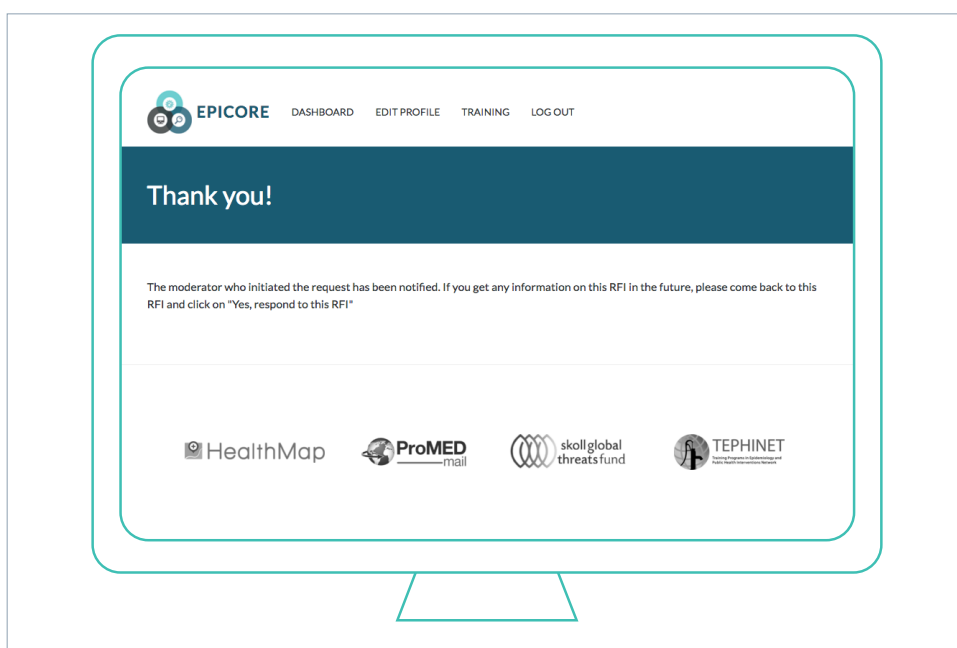
[SUBMIT](#)

It is important to note that even if you wish to remain anonymous, ideally, you will still share your name, title and place of work so that the moderator puts your response in perspective and knows that the information provided is credible before disseminating it, just as any good journalist would do. Moderators are trained to keep your identity confidential and you can always request confidentiality by choosing the red or yellow permission levels. However, **it is completely up to you to decide the level of information you are comfortable disclosing in each response.**

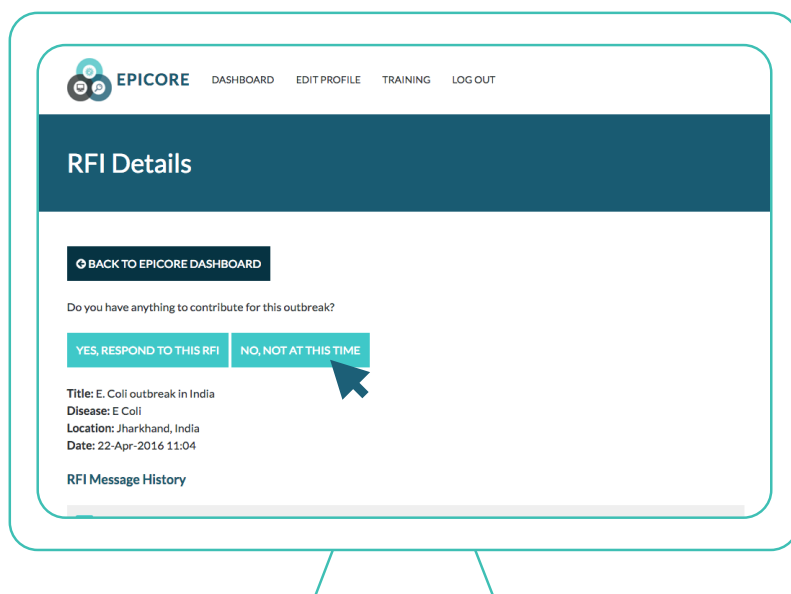


After all the fields have been completed and your preferred permission level settings are selected, click on “SUBMIT”.

***The EpiCore website is built to protect your anonymity. You will also need to safeguard your own privacy, if it is of concern to you, by making sure that you are not being monitored while submitting a response, and by closing all other pages on your browser, as some social media pages, if opened simultaneously with EpiCore, might jeopardize anonymity***



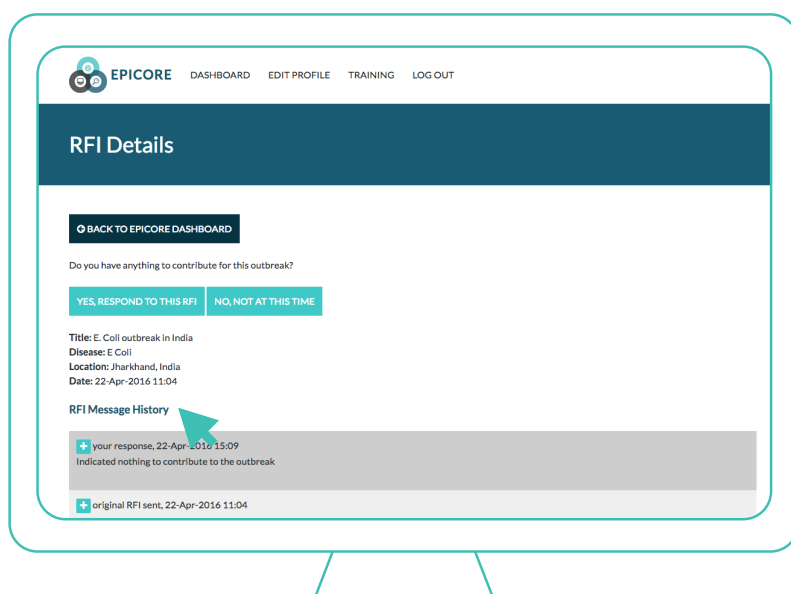
After clicking “submit”, you will be directed to another page where a verification box appears stating that your response has been sent to the moderator who initiated the RFI.



Always remember when responding to an RFI that **some information is better than no information**.

However, if you do not have any information at that time, simply click on “No, not at this time”. ➤

When you click on this button, a message appears on the moderator’s dashboard that a member indicated that they did not have any information to contribute at this time.



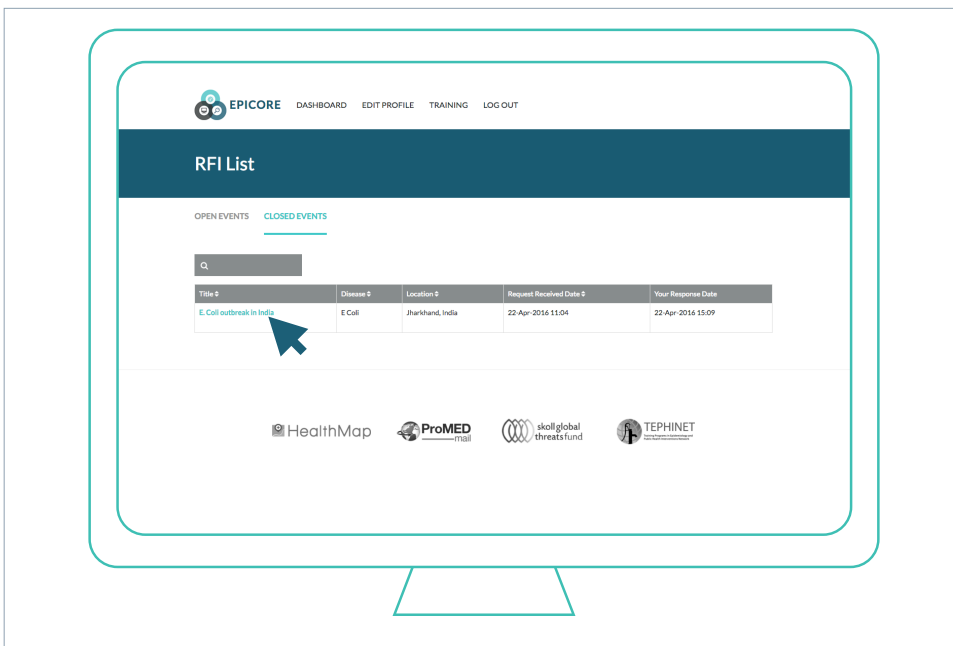
If you come upon new information to contribute to an RFI after you have clicked “No, not at this time”, you can always go back and contribute to the RFI in the future.

Any messaging history for the RFI listed on its page as shown here. ➤

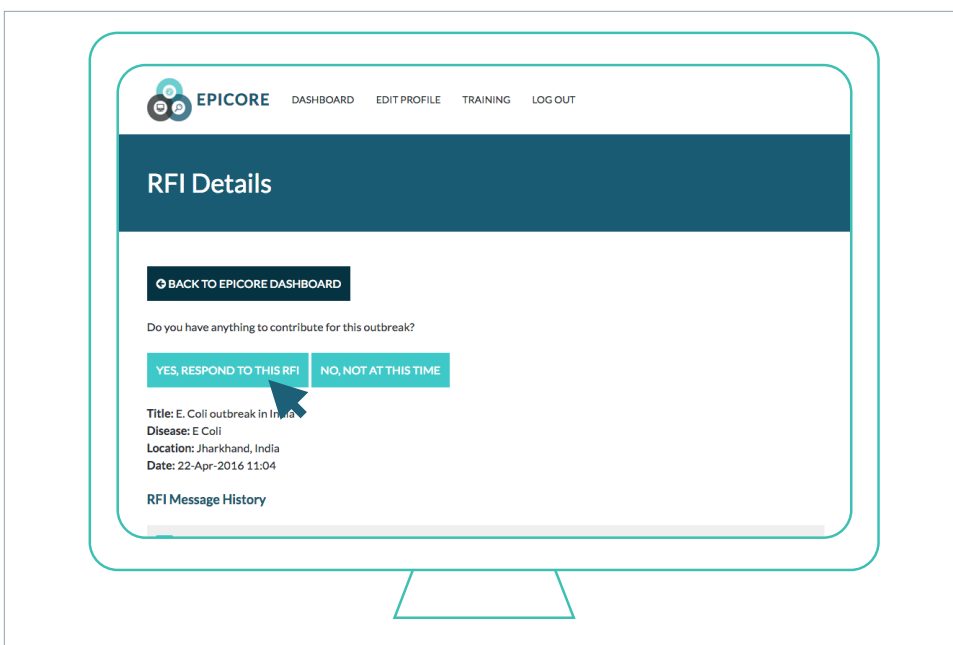
*It is important to note that you will only receive an RFI if an outbreak is suspected in your country or region. This means that you might not receive an RFI for weeks, or you may receive several in the span of a few days.*

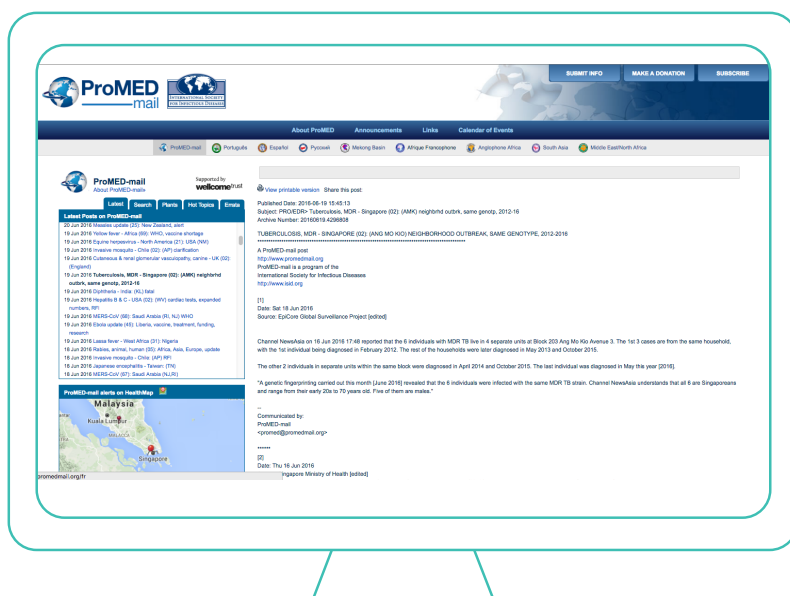
*When a moderator sends an RFI to members within a certain geographic area, he or she will assess all the responses received, and if sufficient information were provided, the moderator might decide to “close” the RFI.*

This will move that RFI from the “Open Events” tab on your dashboard to the “Closed Events” tab. ➡



But note that you will still have the ability to respond to RFIs **even after they are closed**, and this is because we recognize that you might come upon information on an outbreak you think is important to communicate after the moderator closes it.





After the moderator receives your response, he or she will assess it, along with any other responses received, and they will then use the compiled information in a post published online on ProMED-mail's web page and sent to its subscribers. See, it's really that simple!

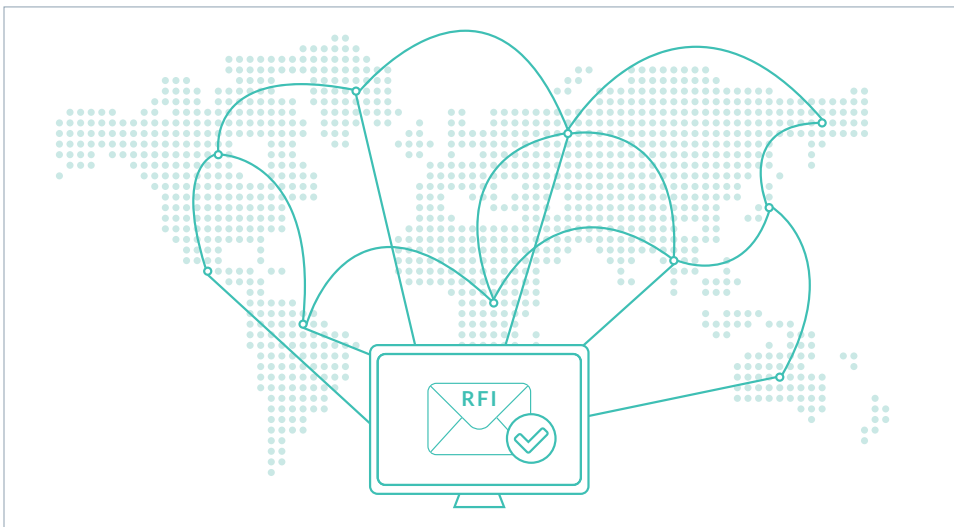


# CONCLUSION

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Your verification of an RFI will help you and the rest of the world detect outbreaks faster by verifying potential outbreak signals.

By detecting outbreaks faster, health officials can generate early responses that can curb epidemics and save lives! Think about what a difference it could have made if we had known about the Ebola or MERS outbreaks a few weeks earlier! This is how you and EpiCore are changing the landscape of outbreak detection and reporting.



We cannot wait to start working with you!

We are happy to answer any questions you may have. Please send any questions to: [info@epicore.org](mailto:info@epicore.org).