Author's response to reviews

Title: Evaluation of school absenteeism data for early outbreak detection, New York City.

Authors:

Melanie Besculides (mbesculides@mathematica-mpr.com)
Richard Heffernan (rheffern@health.nyc.gov)
Farzad Mostashari (fmostash@health.nyc.gov)
Don Weiss (dweiss@health.nyc.gov)

Version: 3 Date: 2 September 2005

Author's response to reviews: see over
Dear reviewer,

Thank you again for reviewing our paper. We have addressed each of your comments point by point below. For the purposes of clarity, we have included your original points before our reply in *italics*. We hope that we have sufficiently addressed all of your suggestions in the revised paper. All the best.

Response to Reviewers

**Reviewer 1 Howard S Burkom**

A) The conclusion should contain the following ideas: (a) this is a nonspecific data source, and your work further demonstrated that the substantial outlier removal required strongly limits the number of useful days of data, (b) you tried nominal alerting methods with reasonable adjustments, and the results may tend to confuse the surveillance picture as much as improve it, (c) the large amount of effort it would take to model these data for better predictions would be a poor investment for the nonspecific information you would gain, and (d) therefore you will not use absenteeism as a primary detection tool (but are looking into more specific school-based evidence). Most of this is in the full-text conclusion. Put at least the main thrust into the abstract conclusion.

*We agree with your comments. The paper’s conclusion addresses these points. We have revised the wording slightly to be more clear. We have also added to the abstract’s conclusion to note that we will not use the data for outbreak detection and are seeking more specific school-based data instead. We are restricted in the amount of text that we can add to the abstract.*

b) Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

*Figures 2a-c have the same long title for different years of data. Instead of repeating the title, it only appears on the first figure (a) with reference to the other two figures (b and c) and the years of data they represent.*

**Reviewer 2 David Buckeridge -no additional comments. Accept without revision.**