

What will make outbreak algorithms useful from the end-user viewpoint?

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Early detection of disease outbreaks has long been a public health concern because of the potential for timely action to minimise morbidity and mortality. Despite the importance of being able to accurately detect and define the occurrence of an outbreak, there appears to be no solid definition of what constitutes an outbreak. This ambiguity was proving to be a problem for a project investigating new methods for outbreak detection being undertaken by Curtin University. I contributed to this bigger project through my AB-CRC summer scholarship by undertaking a qualitative study that engaged with personnel involved in infectious disease surveillance, in order to learn more about how they monitor data and decide which events are of public health importance. I conducted fifteen face-to-face individual semi-structured interviews, which I transcribed and analysed using a thematic content analysis framework. The preliminary results suggest that outbreak detection is a rather intuitive process! The AB-CRC summer scholarship has allowed me to apply my university skills in a practical setting and been a challenging and rewarding experience. Thanks to everyone at Shenton Park for being so welcoming, and so willing to share your knowledge and experience with me.