

departments. Even then, we doubt that the quality of data gleaned would justify the cost incurred.

We fail to see that the quality of information gathered by using the point-radius method would be an improvement over our suggestion. In our original article, we suggested using sets of standardized questions that are tailored to a given vector-borne disease. We also indicated that a critical minimal need includes a basic assessment of whether pathogen exposure likely occurred in 1) the peridomestic environment, 2) outside the peridomestic environment but within the county of residence, or 3) outside the county of residence (2).

The challenge of how to most effectively collect and present spatial epidemiologic data is neither conceptual nor technologic; rather, it is logistic and legal. Any new method must 1) weigh

the public health utility of the method against the time and cost required for the public health system to implement it and 2) comply with existing patient privacy laws. The point-radius method clearly fails on the first count and also likely will present substantial problems in terms of patient privacy.

We agree that presenting data for case counts and disease incidence by ZIP code or census tract falls short of the desired level of spatial precision. However, this realistic compromise 1) is a marked improvement over the current practice to display only county-based spatial patterns for case counts or incidence; 2) incurs only minimal added time and cost for the public health community; and 3) can be implemented, especially for census tracts, with minimal concerns regarding patient privacy.

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## etymologia

### *Brucella* [broo-sel'ə]

Genus of gram-negative, aerobic coccobacilli of the family Brucellaceae, named after Sir David Bruce (1855–1931), a Scottish physician who served abroad with the Royal Army Medical Corps. He investigated Malta fever, a mysterious undulating fever that affected many British soldiers. In 1887 Dr. Bruce established a causal relationship between the disease and an organism later designated *Brucella melitensis* (from Malta). *Brucella* spp. include animal parasites and pathogens, transmissible to humans through dairy products or contact with infected animal tissue.

**Source:** Dorland's illustrated medical dictionary, 31st ed. Philadelphia: Saunders/Elsevier; 2007; <http://www.whonamedit.com>