

Dear Merlin Users,

This document is intended to provide guidance as to how to effectively utilize two Merlin fields on the Basic Data screen: 1) Outbreak and 2) Case Classification.

Field: Outbreak

Field selection options include: outbreak associated, sporadic or unknown

Outbreak associated: Cases should be marked as “outbreak associated” if two or more cases are epidemiologically linked to one another. This would include cases within families. All cases that are epidemiologically linked would need to be marked as “outbreak associated.”

Sporadic: Cases should be classified as sporadic if the case was not able to be epidemiologically linked to another case or known outbreak.

Unknown: Cases should be marked as “unknown” if the disease investigator is unable to make a determination if the case was outbreak associated or sporadic. Case investigators should make every effort to determine if the case was outbreak associated or sporadic and should only use “unknown” if no other determination can be made.

Field: Case Classification

Field selection options include: Primary or Secondary

The “Case Classification” field should always be completed if the case is marked as “outbreak associated.” If the case is a sporadic case, then the “Case Classification” should always be completed as “Primary.”

Primary: If the case is the primary case, or index case, in an outbreak please mark the case as “Primary”. The index or first case in an outbreak is a primary case. In point-source or common-source outbreaks, there will be multiple primary cases. All sporadic cases would be considered primary cases.

Some examples: In the case of a foodborne outbreak, all the initially identified cases that attended the exposure event would be considered “primary.” Secondary case would occur if the agent was transmissible from person to person and contacts of the primary case become ill. In a daycare setting all the cases initially identified with similar onset dates would likely be considered primary

Secondary: If the case is a second generation case in an outbreak, please mark the case as “Secondary”. A secondary case would have been exposed and infected from a primary case. Secondary cases occur if an infectious agent is transmissible from person-to-person. For example, a family unit has 3 sick individuals, a brother and two sisters. The brother was ill first and later, following one incubation period, the two sisters becomes ill, the brother would be marked as “primary” and the sisters marked as “secondary” as they would have been infected following exposure to their brother. For the purpose of recording the

Case Classification field in Merlin all cases that would be considered 3rd, 4th, etc. generation would be classified as “Secondary”.

During the course of an investigation, outbreak cases may need to have their case classification selection updated if new information is learned as to which case or cases represent the index cases.

Cases that are not also linked to an outbreak module, but are listed as outbreak associated should be “epi-linked” using the epi-link feature in Merlin.

The screenshot displays the 'Case Information' form in the Merlin system. The left sidebar contains navigation tabs: 'History', 'Cases', 'Case' (with sub-tabs 'Basic Data', 'Lab Results', 'EPI Link'), 'Case Details' (with sub-tabs 'Case Status', 'Set DX Status', 'Case Symptoms', 'Case Notes', 'Get Physician'), and 'Additional Info' (with sub-tabs 'Attach CRF', 'Case Documents'). The main form area includes a 'Print Case Form' button and various input fields: 'FL Disease Code' (SALMONELLOSIS-2005 UAT - 00300), 'DX Status' (CONFIRMED), 'Investigator', 'CHD Ref#', 'Outcome', 'Animal Exposure' (checkbox), 'Imported' (ACQUIRED IN FLORIDA), 'Origin', 'Outbreak' (OUTBREAK ASSOCIATED), 'Case Classification' (dropdown menu), and 'Outbreak ID' (dropdown menu with 'PRIMARY' and 'SECONDARY' options). A red circle highlights the 'Case Classification' and 'Outbreak ID' fields. At the bottom, a note reads: 'Note: Enter all dates available. Date Reported to CHD AND one other date field is'.