



ADVISOR REVIEWS—STANDARD REVIEW

Disaster Lit: Database for Disaster Medicine and Public Health

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Composite Score: ★★★★★

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Abstract

Disaster Lit: Database for Disaster Medicine and Public Health is created and maintained by the U.S. National Library of Medicine. It is an Open Access database of research literature in disaster medicine and public health. This database provides access to biomedical research, journal research, and grey literature on disaster medicine and public health. It has a well-developed search engine and a good user interface. Disaster Lit is an important database for research in emergency management and disaster preparedness and public health.

Price

Disaster Lit: Database for Disaster Medicine and Public Health is one of the United States National Library of Medicine (NLM) databases of health information freely available on the internet. There is no cost to searching this database however, accessing the full text of some of the content may require a subscription to that publication. Some of the other resources in the database may have licensing and access restrictions including cost for accessing copyright or proprietary data.

Product Overview and Description

U.S. National Library of Medicine (NLM) produces Disaster Lit as part of the functions of the Disaster Information Management Research Center. The Disaster Information Management Research Center provides comprehensive disaster health information related to natural, accidental, or deliberate disasters and for all stages of disaster management efforts (Koustova, 2010). This management research center promotes access to Disaster Literature; Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear and Explosives (CBRNE)/Hazards materials (hazmat) information; Natural and Man-made disasters and Infectious diseases information. In addition, there is access to disaster information specialists. Evidently, Disaster Lit is created for a professional audience. In this case the professional audience are individuals or organizations responsible for the medical and public health aspects of planning, mitigation, response, recovery, and research related to disasters and public health emergencies (NLM 2019).

As a database of disaster medicine and public health information Disaster Lit includes guidelines, reports, proceedings, training, fact sheets in addition to disaster and public health information from PubMed (biomedical journal literature) and MedlinePlus (health information for the public). It also includes 1,400 non-commercial disaster-related resources (NLM, 2019). Although Disaster Lit is an English only resource, it does include international content (NLM, 2019). The following are examples of international content: grey literature from associations, educational institutions, government agencies, and non-government organizations (NGOs) as sources for disaster literature (NLM, 2019) including reports and guidelines from

the World Health Organization. The National Library of Medicine assigns publication type to each resource in the Disaster Lit database. The most common publication types are: Guidelines/Assessment Tool; Report; Instructional/Training Material but also includes the following publication types: Bibliography/Resource List; Book/Book Chapter; Conference/Meeting Material; Database/Dataset; Dictionary/Glossary; Fact Sheet; Hearing/Testimony; Legal Document; Map/Atlas; Reports; Web Page and Website (NLM, 2019). As part of the Disaster Research Response Project, since 2014 Disaster Lit includes records for surveys, interview scripts, and other tools for use in data collection following a disaster.

It is generally expected that information in the public domain should be accessible to all consumers including those with special needs. The U.S. National Library of Medicine (NLM) has a policy to ensure accessibility of websites created by them including Disaster Lit (NLM 2015). National Library of Medicine encourages contacting them for alternative formats if the website is not able to be accessed using special adaptive equipment (NLM 2015).

User Interface and Searching

The user interface for Disaster Lit includes a very simple basic search box (see Figure 1) and an advance search function (see Figure 2). Disaster Lit uses keyword searching across the following fields: title, source, date published, format, annotation, authors, type, access notes and URL (NLM, 2019). Disaster Lit automatically expands keyword searching to include plural, singular and other forms of the word; and it will also automatically search certain synonyms such as typhoon will also search hurricane and cyclone (NLM, 2019). Capitalization is ignored in searching Disaster Lit (NLM, 2019).

Disaster Lit allows for Boolean searching. The Boolean operators that are supported by this database are: AND, OR and NOT. The Boolean operator AND search results contain all the key words; the Boolean operator OR search results contain either keywords; the Boolean operator NOT is used to exclude key words such as “Flu pandemics” NOT Covid-19. The use of quotations provides exact phrase searching (NLM, 2019). Blank search will result in the entire Disaster Lit database being displayed in the search results (NLM, 2019). The advance search feature (see Figure 2) allows you to build a search strategy by searching any or all of the following fields: title, source, publication type, publication year, author, URL and ID; it also provides the use of Boolean operators (AND, OR, and NOT) to build the search (NLM, 2019).

When viewing your results in Disaster Lit you can adjust the number of results on a page; the minimum number of results on a page is 10 and the maximum is 1,000. It is also possible to sort the results by newest first or by source. It is also possible to select the number of results on a page when printing the results, multiple pages of search re-

FIGURE 1 Basic Search Function in Disaster Lit: Database for Disaster Medicine and Public Health

The screenshot shows the Disaster Lit homepage. At the top, there are social media icons for Facebook and Twitter. Below the header, the title "Disaster Lit®" is followed by the subtitle "Database for Disaster Medicine and Public Health". A paragraph describes the database as the National Library of Medicine (NLM) database of links to disaster medicine and public health documents available on the Internet at no cost. It lists the types of documents included: expert guidelines, research reports, conference proceedings, training classes, fact sheets, websites, databases, and similar materials for a professional audience. It also mentions that NLM selects materials from over 1,400 non-commercial publishing sources and supplements disaster-related resources from PubMed (biomedical journal literature) and MedlinePlus (health information for the public). Below this text are links to "Read more about Disaster Lit." and "The Help contains tips and guidelines for searching Disaster Lit." At the bottom, there is a search bar with the placeholder text "Search Disaster Lit" and a blue "Q Search" button. To the right of the search bar, it says "2000 / 2000". At the very bottom, there are links: "Disaster Lit | About Disaster Lit | Help | Advanced Search ▼".

FIGURE 2 Advanced Search Function in Disaster Lit: Database for Disaster Medicine and Public Health

The screenshot shows the Disaster Lit homepage with the advanced search function. The header and introductory text are the same as in Figure 1. Below the introductory text, there is a search bar with the placeholder text "Use the builder below to create your search" and a blue "Q Search" button. To the right of the search bar, it says "2000 / 2000" and "Clear". Below the search bar, there are two dropdown menus, both set to "All fields", and a search box. Below these, there is an "AND" dropdown menu, another "All fields" dropdown menu, and another search box. To the right of the second search box, there are minus and plus signs. At the bottom, there are links: "Disaster Lit | About Disaster Lit | Help | Advanced Search ▲".

The screenshot shows the Disaster Lit search results page for the query "Covid 19". At the top, there is a search bar with the text "Covid 19" and a blue "Q Search" button. To the right of the search bar, it says "1992 / 2000". Below the search bar, there are links: "Disaster Lit | About Disaster Lit | Help | Advanced Search ▼". Below the links, there is a section titled "Refine Your Results" with a "Source" filter. The "Source" filter has a text input field with the placeholder text "Enter text to filter" and a list of sources: "African Forum for Research and Education in Health (AFREhealth) [1]", "Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action [2]", "American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP) [1]", and "American Academy of Pediatrics". Below the "Source" filter, there is a "Publication Type" filter. The main results section shows "Results 501-677 of 677" and "Sort by: Newest First". It also shows "Items per page: 500" and a "Previous Page 2 of 2" navigation bar. The first result is "501. Infectious Disease Toolkit for CoC (Continuum of Care)". The "Source" is "U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)". The "Date Published" is "3/2020". The "Format" is "Text". The "Annotation" is "This toolkit provides structure and specific examples for planning and responding to influenza, coronavirus such as COVID-19, and other infectious diseases. The toolkit consists of three documents that provide information for continuum of care (CoC) leadership, homeless service providers, and partners to utilize when planning for and responding to infectious diseases. [less]". The "URL" is "https://www.hudexchange.info/resource/5985/infectious-disease-toolkit-for-cocs/". The "Type" is "Guideline/Assessment Tool". The "Access Notes" are "Link to Preventing and Managing the Spread of Infectious Disease for https://files.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/Infectious-Disease-Toolkit-for-". At the bottom right, there is a "Back to top" button and a "Homelessness: Managing-the-".

FIGURE 3 Covid-19 Search Results in Disaster Lit

1. ☐ Guidance for Discharge and Ending Isolation in the Context of Widespread Community Transmission of COVID-19-First Update: Technical Report
- Source:** European Union, European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC)
- Date Published:** 4/8/2020
- Format:** PDF
- Annotation:** This eight-page document provides guidance for planning discharge and ending isolation for COVID-19 patients in the context of the phase of ongoing widespread community transmission. There is an increasing need to discharge patients from hospitals early after clinical symptom improvement in order to maintain healthcare capacity for severe and critically ill patients. [less]
- URL:** <https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/publications-data/covid-19-guidance-discharge-and-ending-isolation>
- Type:** Guideline/Assessment Tool
- Access Notes:** Direct link to document: <https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/covid-19-guidance-discharge-and-ending-isolation-first%20update.pdf>
- ID:** 21616. From: Disaster Lit® a database of the U.S. National Library of Medicine.

FIGURE 4 Record from a Search on Covid-19

sults cannot be printed simultaneously (NLM, 2019) Figure 3 shows the results of a search in Disaster Lit for “Covid-19.”

The following are the descriptive elements that are included in each Disaster Lit record: title of the item; source which is the original publisher of the item; date published is the original date the item was published; format of item is it image, PDF, presentation slide, text or video/multimedia; annotation is a description of the item; URL is the location of the item on the web; author includes the names of the creators of this item; publication type describes the type of publication; access notes includes any information regarding special software to access the item or instructions on accessing the item; ID is a unique identifier for the item in the Disaster Lit database. The record will identify if the resource includes research tools and data collection instruments (NLM, 2019). Figure 4 illustrates all the descriptive elements in a record from a search on Covid-19.

Disaster Lit has filters to refine your search. It is possible to filter your results by source, publication type, publication year, author, and if it includes research tools (NLM, 2019). Figure 5 shows examples of the

Disaster Lit filters. Disaster Lit also provides discovery of disaster health information in other NLM databases by running a Disaster Lit search in PubMed, MedlinePlus and National Institute of Health/National Library of Medicine (NIH/NLM). Please see Figure 6 for an illustration of the finding additional disaster information functionality.

Critical Evaluation

CONTENT

Disaster Lit is targeted towards a professional audience in disaster management and public health and this database covers an extensive variety of content that would be relevant to this audience. There is both breadth and depth covered in the content available in this database. Some of the content indexed by Disaster Lit include biomedical journal literature; consumer public health information; grey literature such as research reports and practice guidelines from government and non-governmental agencies and research data collection tools. The broad coverage and variety of types of publications that may be accessed by searching Disaster Lit is a strength of this database. How-

FIGURE 5 Example of Filters in Disaster Lit

FIGURE 6 Finding Additional Disaster Information



Disaster Lit Review Scores Composite: ★★★★★

The maximum number of stars in each category is 5.

Content: ★★★★★ 1/2

This database contains biomedical journal literature, consumer public health information, grey literature such as research reports and practice guidelines from government and non-governmental agencies, as well as research data collection tools. However, resources are in English only.

Searchability: ★★★ 1/2

Search interface is clean and intuitive. The database has two different search options, basic and advance search. The basic search has automatic truncation and synonym search, which reduces specificity and transparency of search strategy. The advance search supports the use of Boolean operators but not controlled vocabularies. Search results are sorted by date and source of publication.

Price: N/A

Accessing information in this database is free. However, subscription cost may be required to access full text of some publications and some other resources may have licensing and access restrictions including cost for accessing copyright or proprietary data.

Contract Provisions: N/A

Searching this database is free.

ever, a weakness in the language of the content is the fact that it is an English only resource.

USER INTERFACE AND SEARCHING

The basic search interface of Disaster Lit is very clean with a single search box. The basic search is also very intuitive and easy to use for a novice researcher by automatically including truncation for searching forms of words such as singular and plural; and using Boolean operator OR for searching synonyms. However, the features of simplifying searching by automatically including truncation of forms of words and synonym searching may be a weakness for the experienced researcher as these features remove control and specificity of the search strategy and makes the search strategy less transparent. Some of the benefits of the advanced search function in Disaster Lit is that it allows you to search a field and build a search strategy using the Boolean operators (AND, OR, NOT), however it does not allow for the use of proximity operators (NEAR and WITHIN). A weakness of the advance search function is it does not support controlled vocabulary searching such as Medical Subject Headings that are used in searching PubMed. The basic and advanced search features both allow for phrased keyword searching. The search results in Disaster Lit are listed in order of date of publication (newest to oldest) and alphabetical order by the source of the publication. Disaster Lit does not use relevancy ranking in order to sort search results.

Competitive Products

There does not appear to be a single database that competes directly with Disaster Lit: Database for Disaster Medicine and Public Health. However, there are several databases that cover aspects of the content in Disaster Lit. NIH Disaster Research Response (DR2) provides access to tools that may be used to collect research data during a disaster, emergency or crisis. PubMed and PubMed Central index journal

literature on natural disasters, bioterrorism, chemical terrorism, and pandemic flu (NLM, 2019). Global Index Medicus produced by the World Health Organization provides biomedical and public health literature from an international perspective. Homeland Security Digital Library is a database containing documents related to homeland security in the United States. This homeland security database includes American policy, strategy, and organizational management, including information related to terrorism and natural and man-made disasters (NLM, 2019). The new ProQuest Coronavirus Research Database has a narrower scope than Disaster Lit however both databases include research on the Covid-19 (*The Charleston Advisor* 2020). Whereas the databases referenced above were written primarily for a professional audience and reflect significant content overlap with Disaster Lit, MedlinePlus Disaster and Emergency Topics are written for a general audience.

Contract Provisions

Disaster Lit provides searching for health information freely available on the internet. Some of the content in this database may require a subscription to that publication. Some of the other resources may have licensing and access restrictions.

Contact Information

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URL: <<https://disasterinfo.nlm.nih.gov/disaster-lit>>

Free Text Keywords: disaster | disaster medicine | disaster preparedness | emergency management | public health | infectious diseases | hazardous materials

Primary Category: Emergency Management

Secondary Categories: Disaster Medicine; Public Health; Multi-disciplinary (or interdisciplinary)

Type of Product being Reviewed: Abstract index database; Aggregator database; Discovery tool; Library tool; Website

Target Audience: Emergency Management Professionals; Public Health Professionals; Researchers

Access Type(s): Open Access

National Library of Medicine. "Disaster Lit: Database for Disaster Medicine and Public Health." NLM. 2019. <<https://disasterinfo.nlm.nih.gov/disaster-lit>>

ProQuest. "Coronavirus Research Database Gives ProQuest Users No-Cost Access to Essential Coverage of COVID-19 and More Press Release." *The Charleston Advisor* (March 2020). <http://www.charlestonco.com/index.php?do=Press+Room&pg=pr_details&pr_id=3736>

About the Author


Marcia Salmon is a Digital Scholarship Metadata Librarian and is an active member of the Health, Sciences and Engineering Disciplinary Cluster at the Scott Library at York University in Toronto, Canada. She received an honors B.Sc. in Biology and Applied Educational Psychology from University of Toronto, and a MLIS (Master of Library and Information Science) from the University of Western Ontario. ■

Authentication

This database is freely available; authentication is not necessary.

Author's References

Helen Koustova. "Disaster Information Management Research Center (DIMRC): A Gateway to Disaster Information Resources." *Journal of Electronic Resources in Medical Libraries*, Vol. 7 no. 4 (2010): 326-335. <<https://doi.org/10.1080/15424065.2010.527251>>



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