



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

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STATE HEALTH COMMISSIONER

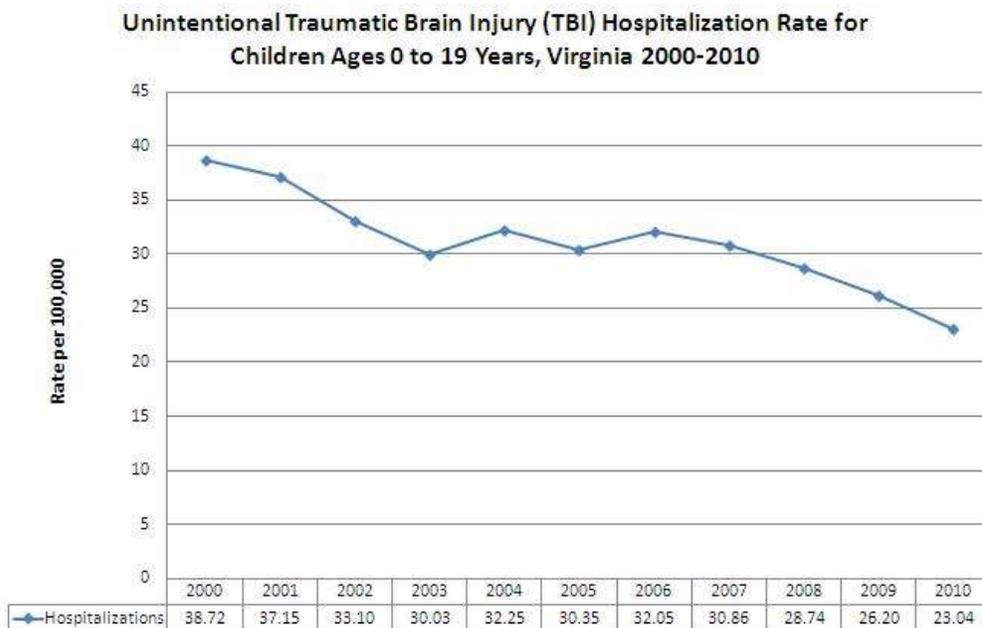
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June 14, 2012

Dear Colleague,

Commissioner James Rothrock, Department of Rehabilitative Services (DRS), and I are writing to share some good news regarding serious traumatic brain injury (TBI) rates in Virginia, and to also seek your help with reporting of its milder forms.

As you know, TBI affects patients of all ages and there are many potential causes. Children are particularly vulnerable to injuries to the brain because their brains are still developing and the full impact of mild TBI that occurs from birth through the teenage years is just beginning to be understood. Fortunately in Virginia, there has been a steady decline in the number of children hospitalized for TBI resulting from an unintentional injury. Since 2006, the rate of hospitalization among children for severe TBI decreased 40 percent and over the past ten years, the number of pediatric deaths from accidental injuries (including head injuries) has declined 45 percent.



Despite this success, it is suspected that mild TBI, such as concussions, are greatly underreported. There is an increasing concern that individuals, especially young athletes, may suffer short and long-term health complications from undiagnosed and unmanaged concussions. These concerns are further supported by research findings from the American Academy of Pediatrics which highlighted the need to revise concussion detection and management guidelines.

Legislation in Virginia, aimed at protecting young athletes from brain injuries, is having an impact on the way mild TBI is managed. The law, which was adopted July 1, 2011, requires that a student-athlete suspected of sustaining a concussion be removed from play, may not return to play that day and must have written medical clearance from an appropriate licensed health care provider in order to return to play. An appropriate licensed health care provider in this setting has been identified as being a physician, physician assistant, osteopath or athletic trainer licensed by the Virginia Board of Medicine; a neuropsychologist licensed by the Board of Psychology; or a nurse practitioner licensed by the Virginia State

Board of Nursing. As a result of this law, you may see an increase in the number of young patients with suspected mild TBI, who are seeking medical evaluation and management.

Please consider the following resources to assist you in your efforts to prevent, diagnose and manage care for mild brain injury:

- Guidance from VDH on traumatic brain injury in children, www.preventinjuriesva.com
- The Virginia Academy of Family Physicians, http://www.vafp.org/concussion_management.html
- The Virginia High School League, resources for managing concussions in sports activities, <http://www.vhsl.org>
- Information and concussion evaluation tools can be found on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website, <http://preventingconcussions.org>

Although effective TBI prevention is reaping benefits in children, those of you in clinical practice continue to see new cases as well as provide care to individuals suffering disabilities from past head injuries. While some patients may need treatment to address short-term challenges associated with TBI, others may require special services for the rest of their lives. The Brain Injury Services Coordination Unit located within the Community Based Services (CBS) Division at DRS (to be the Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services effective July 1, 2012), serves as a point of contact for individuals and their families seeking general or agency-specific information about brain injury resources. As you coordinate care with patients, we would ask that you please consider sharing the resource options listed below:

- The Brain Injury Coordination Unit, www.vadrs.org/cbs/biscis.htm, for information on eligibility, including a list of available services statewide through a network of state-funded specialized brain injury case managers and other services such as information & referral and clubhouse programs.
- The Brain Injury Association of Virginia (BIAV) offers free brain injury education, outreach, public awareness, and advocacy services. BIAV, www.biav.net, operates a statewide toll-free helpline, 800-444-6443, to help patients, their families, and caregivers locate resources available in the community.

Commissioner Rothrock and I thank you for your efforts to help meet the needs of the 88,000 Virginians living with disabilities caused by TBI (of which an estimated 21,000 are children) and the more than 93,000 that live with impairments as a consequence of TBI-induced strokes. We will continue, with your help, to work to increase the number of Virginians returning to their full potential after such an injury and to assist those with a TBI-induced disability in reaching their full potential.

Sincerely,

Karen Remley, MD, MBA, FAAP
State Health Commissioner

Sincerely,

James Rothrock
Commissioner of Rehabilitative Services