

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH SPONSORS ANTHRAX
COUNTERMEASURES DISTRIBUTION EXERCISE**

(RICHMOND, Va.)—The Virginia Department of Health and its emergency preparedness partners are participating in a two-day exercise to demonstrate federal and state strategies for responding to an aerosolized anthrax attack.

“The importance of this type of exercise has even more resonance in light of recent events regarding the federal investigation of the anthrax-laced mailings that followed the Sept. 11 terror attacks,” said State Health Commissioner Karen Remley, M.D., MBA.

The exercise began Monday morning with “reports” of patients who experienced a flu-like illness and went to hospitals over the weekend. This was followed by law enforcement’s detainment and investigation of a fictitious individual claiming to have released a biologic agent into the environment.

As the exercise unfolded, the Commonwealth of Virginia collected, transported and analyzed samples; collaborated with state and federal partners on response options; and requested actual caches of federal medical supplies from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

“The Commonwealth’s response capabilities were made fully operational to accommodate the receiving, staging and management of the federal stockpile once it was received by Virginia Monday night,” said Steve Harrison, assistant director, Emergency Preparedness and Response Programs. “Operations were sustained overnight and will continue until the exercise ends later today to demonstrate shift changes and prolonged support.”

“Our goal during this exercise is to respond to this situation as if it were an actual event,” said William Nelson, M.D., interim deputy commissioner, Emergency Preparedness and Response Programs. “We’re not just playing a game, we’re testing real plans, procedures and staff capabilities so that our emergency response community will be prepared if we ever face a bioterrorism or disease outbreak in the Commonwealth.”

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