



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

Department of Health

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STATE HEALTH COMMISSIONER

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Dear Colleague,

This last month, Virginians experienced both an earthquake and a hurricane. Many of you provided timely advice to patients and implemented thoughtful plans in the health care community, resulting in an effective and efficient response to these events. While the loss of four lives from Hurricane Irene saddened all of us, many deaths were prevented by our communities listening and following appropriate precautions both during the storm and in the recovery phases. Thank you for your leadership in preparing and responding to these events.

We now are approaching the tenth anniversary of the September 11th attacks and the anthrax bioterrorism event. These infamous events changed the way our nation approaches emergency preparedness. While many memorial activities are planned to recognize the many Americans senselessly killed, one important way to recognize the loss of those lives and of those who have died protecting our nation from terrorism is to continue to improve our vigilance and be prepared.

As you engage in personal, professional and organizational planning and exercises for many different types of events, I want to reaffirm the Virginia Department of Health's (VDH) partnership with the clinical community. I also want to offer you important resources for those rare occasions in which you must consider and respond to the possibility that what you are seeing in a patient or a group of patients is the result of a manmade event such as bioterrorism.

As a pediatric emergency medicine specialist, I am well aware that clinicians are trained and dedicated to applying their skills to individual patients. However, you may on occasion be in a situation in which you notice a possible pattern consistent with a chemical, nuclear, environmental or bioterrorism mishap affecting one or more individuals. I encourage you to reach out promptly to your local public health professionals for consultation in such instances. Your local health director stands ready to assist you and to help you tap effectively into indicated local, state and national public health resources. To find the local health department nearest you, please visit <http://www.vdh.virginia.gov/lhd>.

VDH is committed to communicating important public health information to the medical community and to the public. I will continue to update you on important issues shared between the greater medical community and public health through letters and information on the VDH website at www.vdh.virginia.gov. Communication is a two-way street and we in public health depend on observant clinicians to keep us in sync with the health of communities. We all know

that while most hoofbeats are not zebras, sometimes one does gallop through. I want you to know what to do when that happens. For more information on emergency preparedness please visit www.cdc.gov and the VDH website.

Again, as we remember those very sad events of ten years ago, we are reminded to continue our commitment to learn, prepare and rapidly respond to any event affecting the health of our communities.

Sincerely,

Karen Remley, MD, MBA, FAAP
State Health Commissioner