



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

Department of Health
P O BOX 2448
RICHMOND, VA 23218

KAREN REMLEY, MD, MBA, FAAP
STATE HEALTH COMMISSIONER

TTY 7-1-1 OR
1-800-828-1120

September 28, 2012

Dear Colleague,

September is National Preparedness Month and I wanted to take this opportunity to reinforce the relationship between clinical practice and public health as essential to preparedness in Virginia. Many of you may be familiar with the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) "If You See Something, Say Something™" campaign to heighten vigilance in our day-to-day activities. I am asking you to consider something similar related to your practice that may have a larger public health impact.

Many may recall the medical school dictum related to differential diagnoses: "When you hear hoof beats behind you, don't expect to see a zebra." Sometimes, however, it will be a zebra. If you think it is a zebra, I want you to say something. During the anthrax attacks in 2001, clinicians made the first diagnosis in an emergency department. Frequently, a foodborne disease outbreak is first recognized by a physician who identifies a common exposure in unrelated patients. An astute clinician who diagnoses a reportable illness and alerts the local health department may be detecting a bioterrorism attack or a disease outbreak and putting in motion actions that will save his or her patient and many others.

Many of you already are well connected to your local health districts and the physicians who lead those health departments. Today, there are additional steps we can take together to cement that critical relationship.

- If you suspect an unusual communicable disease or environmental exposure diagnosis, call your local health department. Do not wait for laboratory confirmation. For the truly unexpected, do not rely on someone else to make the call.
- If you suspect an outbreak or know that outreach is needed to prevent diseases in contacts, call your local health department. They will do the leg work to investigate, so that collectively we prevent additional illness.
- Add the name, email address and telephone numbers of the physician director of your local health district to your contact list. The attached list provides the key contact information that you need and which you may want to print out for reference.

These efforts will help build resilience in our healthcare delivery system. A robust relationship between the clinicians and the public health professionals who are serving the same community will be beneficial for each party and for the people of Virginia. Thank you for taking the time to consider these words and for your ongoing commitment to improving the public's health, one patient at a time.

Lastly, the Virginia Department of Health offers all health care professionals an opportunity to subscribe to an agency listserv. This service will continue to keep you informed of public health matters impacting you and your patients. Subscribe by visiting www.vdh.virginia.gov/clinicians or directly access the subscription page by visiting, <https://vms.vdh.virginia.gov/vdhcomm/index.jsp>.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Karen Remley, MD, MBA, FAAP
State Health Commissioner