Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease

Agent: Believed to be caused by a prion protein.
Mode of Transmission: The majority of classic cases are sporadic, with no known source. A small percentage of cases (5%-15%) may be due to heredity or exposure to organ tissue contaminated with the prion. A form of the disease, variant CJD (vCJD), is thought to be transmitted through ingestion of beef from cattle infected with bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE, or mad cow disease).
Signs/Symptoms: Symptoms may begin with confusion, and they rapidly progress to a wide range of neurological signs and symptoms, including loss of coordination and dementia.
Prevention: Avoid organ and tissue transplants from infected individuals. For protection against vCJD, the federal government has regulations in place to prevent the spread of BSE in the United States.
Other Important Information: vCJD occurs in younger individuals, while sporadic CJD occurs more often in older individuals and has a slower progression. In Virginia, CJD is reportable when it occurs in persons under 55 years of age.

No cases of Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease in persons less than 55 years of age were reported in Virginia during 2008. The last reported case occurred in 2007 in a white male in the 30-39 year age group, and the infection was determined to be sporadic CJD. The individual died as a result of this condition. There have been six cases of classic CJD infection diagnosed in Virginia residents less than 55 years of age since 1998.

The only case of vCJD ever diagnosed in a Virginia resident occurred in 2006. Based on the patient's history, it was determined that the infection most likely occurred from contaminated cattle products consumed as a child when living in Saudi Arabia. It was the third case of vCJD reported in a U.S. resident. The two previously reported cases were born and raised in the United Kingdom, where they were believed to have been infected.