

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH INVESTIGATES
ILLNESS OF PORTSMOUTH WOMAN**

Ongoing consultation with the CDC, international medical experts and the Portsmouth Health Department indicates that there is no risk to the public's health

(Richmond, Va.)—The Virginia Department of Health (VDH) is investigating the recent illness of a Portsmouth woman who died April 9, 2008. The patient suffered from encephalopathy which is a degenerative disease of the brain.

“Our hearts go out to the family of this young woman,” said Portsmouth District Health Director, Demetria Lindsay, M.D. “This is a very sad time and we extend our earnest condolences to the family and loved ones.”

An MRI, or brain scan, has been sent to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) for analysis. Additional tests will be conducted by the University of Virginia and the National Prion Disease Pathology Surveillance Center. The final results of all tests are expected to take several months.

Recent news reports have linked variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease (vCJD) to the patient's illness. “There are a wide variety of causes of encephalopathy,” explained State Health Commissioner, Karen Remley, M.D., M.B.A. “Infections, lack of oxygen to the brain, liver failure, kidney failure, toxic exposures, metabolic diseases, brain tumors, increased intracranial pressure, and poor nutrition are all related to encephalopathy. Further testing is the only way to know what caused this illness.”

VCJD is a very rare neurodegenerative disease linked to consumption of beef infected with bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) and is invariably fatal. At least 200 cases have been reported worldwide since 1996. Diagnosis of the disease can be difficult and time consuming. VCJD differs from Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease (CJD) in that CJD is not linked to beef consumption. While both are very rare brain disorders, the two are different diseases. Neither is spread casually from person to person.

“To date there have been three cases of vCJD reported in U.S. residents, all of whom were exposed outside the country,” adds Dr. Remley.

For more information about vCJD and CJD visit www.cdc.gov, www.cjdfoundation.org, and www.vdh.virginia.gov.

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