



Trust for America's Health Statement on SARS Surveillance Efforts and Need for Nationwide Health Tracking to Protect Public's Health

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Washington, DC, April 11, 2003 – Trust for America's Health (TFAH), a nonprofit advocacy group focused on improving the nation's health, commends the request made yesterday by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to states to consider tracking cases of severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS).

“Disease tracking is the most basic and necessary tool for disease prevention and control,” said Shelley A. Hearne, DrPH, Executive Director of TFAH. “Our country has stopped plagues of the past, from typhoid to smallpox, with strong public health measures. Now, we should be putting modern public health measures, starting with disease tracking, to work to help us battle today's epidemics. Tracking is an essential step on the nationwide road to recovery not only for infectious diseases like SARS and West Nile Virus, but also for chronic illnesses including cancer and diabetes.”

In order to better use health tracking to control disease outbreaks and improve prevention of ongoing health threats, TFAH is calling for:

- States to track SARS in accordance with the CDC's request to help contain the spread of the disease.
- Support for a comprehensive Nationwide Health Tracking Network to study where and when a full spectrum of diseases strike throughout the country, giving public health professionals the information they need to take steps to prevent future illness. This would build upon the pilot CDC program for which Congress allocated \$28 million in FY 2003 to support pilot programs in states and cities.
- Support for the Global Pathogen Surveillance Act, introduced by Senator Joseph R. Biden, Jr. (D-DE) yesterday to enhance global disease surveillance. This act would give developing countries resources to respond to disease outbreaks. This is a critical component in protecting the American public from epidemics given widespread international travel.

TFAH's mission is to protect the health and safety of all communities from current and emerging threats by strengthening the fundamentals of our public health defenses. More information about TFAH is available at www.healthyamericans.org.

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