



STUDY FINDS ANIMAL-BORNE DISEASES, INCLUDING WEST NILE, MAD COW, LYME DISEASE, AND MONKEYPOX, 'OUT OF CONTROL'

Advocacy Group Warns Lack of a Concerted National Approach to Control and Prevention Puts Americans At Risk, Federal Attention is Critical

Contact: Laura Segal, (202) 223-9870 x 278 or lsegal@tfah.org or Michael Earls, (202) 223-9870 x 273 or mearls@tfah.org.

WASHINGTON, August 5, 2003 – A report released today by Trust for America's Health (TFAH) found that despite the surge of animal-borne diseases threatening the health of Americans, the country lacks a concerted national approach to prevent and control these illnesses, which can impact humans, animals and the country's food supply.

The report examines the public health response to five animal-borne diseases: monkeypox, West Nile virus (WNV), mad cow disease, Lyme disease, and chronic wasting disease (CWD).

“Our national policy toward animal-borne diseases is the equivalent of trying to run a zoo without a zookeeper,” said Shelley A. Hearne, DrPH, Executive Director of TFAH. “How many wake-up calls do we need before we take action? With West Nile virus back stronger than ever this year, the detection of mad cow disease in Canada in May, and the emergence of monkeypox and SARS, you'd think we'd get it. We need a strong, proactive approach to deal with these diseases.”

TFAH's study found that as many as seven cabinet-level agencies, hundreds of state and local public health and environmental organizations, and thousands of health workers played crucial roles in managing recent outbreaks of animal-borne diseases. Meanwhile, factors, like increased human and animal contact, altered animal and bird migration routes, a thriving exotic pet trade, and high-speed inter-continental travel, have all been contributing to the rise in these disease.

The study calls for policy changes to better prepare the nation against animal-borne diseases. This includes recommending that Congress conduct hearings to examine the best way to build an effective national approach to ensure that the public health response to animal-borne diseases is unified, coherent, and proactive. It also supports a call for a truly comprehensive nationwide health tracking network to allow officials to better identify a disease's origin, facilitate diagnosis and treatment, and contain its spread.

The report authors include Georges Benjamin, MD, FACP, and Shelley A. Hearne, Dr.PH. Dr. Benjamin is Executive Director of the American Public Health Association (APHA), Past President of the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials (ASTHO), and Past Secretary of Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene.

In addition to serving as Executive Director TFAH, Dr. Hearne is also a Visiting Scholar at Johns Hopkins University Bloomberg School of Public Health, Chair of American Public Health Association's Executive Board, and past Executive Director of the Pew Environmental Health Commission at Johns Hopkins.

The report was supported by grants from The Pew Charitable Trusts and the Palmer Foundation. It is available on TFAH's Web site at www.healthyamericans.org.

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Trust for America's Health is a non-profit, non-partisan organization dedicated to saving lives by protecting the health of every community and working to make disease prevention a national priority.