

STATE OF CALIFORNIA

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DATE: October 26, 2001

TO: Veterinary Colleagues

SUBJECT: ANIMALS AS SENTINELS FOR ACCIDENTAL OR INTENTIONAL
INTRODUCTION OF DISEASE: ROLE OF VETERINARY
SURVEILLANCE

Although the threat of intentional introduction of disease is low, during this time of heightened alert veterinarians can play a significant role in passive surveillance. The Veterinary Public Health Section (VPHS), California Department of Health Services and the Animal Health Branch (AHB), California Department of Food and Agriculture are sending this letter to the veterinary medical community in California to provide information and encourage reporting of unusual diseases in animals.

To date, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report 15 (11 confirmed, 4 suspected) cases of anthrax in the District of Columbia (DC), Florida, New Jersey, New York City (NYC), Maryland, Pennsylvania, and Virginia from intentional delivery of *Bacillus anthracis* spores through mailed letters or packages. No animal or human anthrax cases or contaminated letters have been reported in California. A detailed report of the current events is available on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's website at: <http://www.bt.cdc.gov> and <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/>.

Your assistance in enhancing veterinary disease surveillance for anthrax or other unusual animal diseases is requested since your awareness, suspicion, and detection of certain infectious diseases, or unusual patterns of disease, may be the first indication of an accidental or intention introduction. Rapid reporting, diagnosis, and the immediate epidemiologic investigation that will follow could save animal or human lives by confining the spread of disease and/or by the use of appropriate prophylactic or therapeutic medications. In addition to a short list of zoonotic diseases of concern, the use of foreign animal disease agents is also a possibility.

All animals including pets, livestock, and wildlife, may serve as sentinels of disease. Events suggestive of intentional introduction of disease may include:

- Recognition of higher than expected numbers of unexplained illness or death in animals in a brief time period
- Cluster of suspect or laboratory confirmed feline or canine plague cases in an endemic area or a single case in a non-endemic area in an animal with no travel history
- Cluster of suspect or laboratory confirmed anthrax cases in livestock or pets with no known risk factors
- Cluster of suspected or laboratory confirmed botulism cases in livestock or pets with no known risk factors