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September 20, 2005

TO: Each Supervisor

FROM: Thomas L. Garthwaite, M.D. Thomas L Garthwaite
Director and Chief Medical Officer

Jonathan E. Fielding, M.D., M.P.H. Jonathan E. Fielding MD
Director of Public Health and Health Officer

SUBJECT: **HURRICANE KATRINA - PUBLIC HEALTH IMPLICATIONS**

On September 6, 2005, the Board approved a motion by Supervisor Burke, instructing the Director of Public Health and Health Officer to provide a report to the Board at the September 13, 2005 meeting concerning the public health implications of Hurricane Katrina and provide recommendations on any ways in which Los Angeles County could assist with the public health aspects of the recovery and rebuilding. A formal report on that motion was continued for one week. This is an updated report in response to that motion.

Public Health Implications:

There remain significant public health implications for those persons affected by Hurricane Katrina. Those who remain in areas without potable water, electricity, and adequate safe food, face significant risks of dehydration, malnourishment, and gastro-intestinal illness. It should be noted, however, that severe diarrheal illnesses, such as cholera and typhoid, have not occurred and are not anticipated. Mosquito borne illnesses, such as those caused by West Nile virus remain a concern but spraying has to this point reduced the mosquito population.

The mayor had advanced a plan for the stepwise repopulation of New Orleans, now stayed because of another possible hurricane in the region. The plan was to start with the Algers area on the West

Bank which was never flooded. However, the vast majority of New Orleans is still without potable water, and many parts do not have functioning sewage systems. Concerns about premature repopulation of some affected areas have been voiced by the President and Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) senior managers.

Major immediate public health concerns are problems due to:

- Lack of potable water for drinking, cooking, bathing etc.
- Lack of functioning sewage systems with the possibility of sewage back-up spilling on to city streets.
- Risk of injury from affected residential and commercial structures.
- Lack of a functioning 911 emergency response system.
- Uneven availability of health care services.

In addition there are risks related to the inappropriate use of generators, gas leaks, consumption of tainted food and possible environmental exposures.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and FEMA are continuing careful monitoring and surveillance to determine health problems related to Katrina and better characterize environmental and other health threats.

The State of Louisiana had initially requested that we provide 10 environmental health inspectors to help them inspect retail food establishments that wished to resume operations. We responded that we have inspectors available for this assistance, contingent on facilities being available to house them while they are in Louisiana. However, the State subsequently received a large number of Federal inspectors and does not need our group for the short term.

Work with Evacuees in Los Angeles County

We have been working closely with City of Los Angeles to assure the provision of appropriate health and public health services to evacuees who have registered with FEMA. We are working with the Greater Los Angeles Chapter of the American Red Cross, who is operating a service center for evacuees at 2700 Wilshire Boulevard. A staffing schedule has been developed to assure that three public health nurses are available at the Service Center through October 31. Public Health nurses are scheduled to complete the American Red Cross Disaster Worker Training for registered nurses that will facilitate their work at shelters, intake centers, and at the service center. Seventy nurses are scheduled to complete training by September 27.

Additionally, we conducted an environmental assessment of the Dream Center in Echo Park on September 9, 2005. The kitchen facility was found to be structurally sound but required some operational maintenance. We required a thorough cleaning of floors, walls, equipment and utensils; a review of safe food handling techniques; and utilization of single-service utensils in food service

areas whenever possible. A revisit is scheduled for Tuesday, September 20, to ensure that safe food handling practices are in place. Our staff is also in the process of evaluating the Salvation Army facility in Bell.

We are working with the Emergency Medical Services Agency to monitor the health status of evacuees seen for emergency care in Los Angeles County. As of September 19, 2005, 24 hospitals had submitted information through the Reddinet system on 86 individuals. These were seen for a variety of conditions, and 17 individuals required hospitalization. We will continue to monitor available information to assure that public health concerns are quickly identified and addressed.

We will continue to keep the Board informed of the status of our offers of Public Health support to the areas most affected by Hurricane Katrina. If you have any questions or need additional information, please let either of us know.

TLG: JEF: lm
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c: Chief Administrative Officer
County Counsel
Executive Officer, Board of Supervisors