



April 4, 2025

The Honorable Robert F. Kennedy, Jr.
US Department of Health & Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Secretary Kennedy,

The Association of Public Health Laboratories (APHL) urges you to reinstate all personnel who worked in the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) laboratories within the Division of STD Prevention (DSTDP) and the Division of Viral Hepatitis (DVH). APHL represents state, local and territorial public health laboratories across the US, and our close partnership with CDC is built on a commitment to protect the public's health by preventing and responding to infectious diseases and other health threats. As you proceed with the reinstatement of those Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) staff who were mistakenly included on reduction in force lists, we urge you to include DSTDP and DVH laboratory staff. **Their loss eliminated critical national testing services that do not exist anywhere else within the HHS agencies.**

The DSTDP Laboratory Branch was the national lead for testing and genomic surveillance for antibiotic resistant gonorrhea. Further, multi-drug resistant gonorrhea – often called “super gonorrhea” – is a growing and serious threat. In 2023 super gonorrhea was found in Massachusetts with support from the DSTDP Laboratory Branch. In addition to performing this testing to detect new strains of resistance, it also informed treatment recommendations to ensure that gonorrhea is treated effectively.

The DSTDP Laboratory Branch developed laboratory testing guidelines for diseases like chlamydia, gonorrhea and syphilis to ensure all US laboratories (not only public health laboratories) were using the latest testing technology effectively and producing the highest quality diagnostic testing. It also directly conducted surveillance testing to monitor rare and emerging sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

The DVH Laboratory Branch had the highest degree of viral hepatitis expertise of any public health laboratory in the world. This laboratory evaluated new testing technologies and developed laboratory testing guidelines to ensure all US laboratories were using it effectively and producing the highest quality diagnostic testing. It also provided recommendations for testing approaches aimed at detecting acute hepatitis C (HCV) infections to facilitate faster treatment and support national HCV elimination goals. There is a current ongoing HCV outbreak in Florida; specimens sent to the DVH laboratory were in transit when it was shuttered and now have no way of being tested. That means additional cases and outbreaks could be missed.

The DVH Laboratory Branch investigated large outbreaks of viral hepatitis including hepatitis A, B and C. Recent examples include outbreaks in California, Kentucky, Michigan, Oregon, Utah and Washington.

The Laboratory Branch coordinated and conducted this testing to identify links between human cases and the source of the outbreak using next generation sequencing.

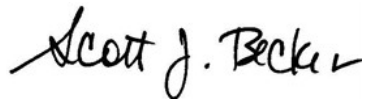
The DVH Laboratory Branch provided training to public health laboratories on using next generation sequencing to look for related infections. It also provided testing for rare forms of viral hepatitis including hepatitis D and E.

These laboratory operations were critical to the work of addressing STIs and viral hepatitis. We ask that the personnel in these laboratories be reinstated quickly so they may resume their work. There are specimens from across the country that are awaiting testing or are in transit.

CDC cannot focus on infectious disease prevention and response without all CDC laboratories being intact and fully supported. All state and local public health laboratories rely on CDC to be the nation's ultimate reference lab. CDC is the glue that holds the US laboratory system together and that system will struggle without these vital laboratories.

I welcome the opportunity to meet with your staff to discuss ways to continue to strengthen CDC's laboratories. I may be reached at scott.becker@aphl.org or 227-241-9019.

Sincerely,



Scott J. Becker
Chief Executive Officer
Association of Public Health Laboratories (APHL)

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