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TO: All Local Health Officers

FROM: Christopher Rinn, Assistant Commissioner
Division of Public Health Infrastructure, Laboratories and Emergency Preparedness

The New Jersey Department of Health State Public Health and Environmental Laboratory (PHEL) is a resource which serves the entire public health community in New Jersey and is comprised of five service areas: Public Health Laboratory Services, Environmental and Chemical Laboratory Services, Clinical Laboratory Improvement Services, Policy Planning and Regulatory Compliance, and Administrative/Financial Services.

PHEL strives for quality in all areas of service to the residents of New Jersey through its programs of newborn screening (including 54 disorders, which, if not detected early, can cause severe health problems, interfere with mental development or even cause death), bio and chemical threat detection and response, ensuring water quality, and identifying infectious disease outbreaks and other public health threats.

The successful investigation and mitigation of public health problems and environmental hazards often depends on laboratory testing which provides vital support to an investigation and response to health problems and environmental public health hazards.

We recognize that, in New Jersey, there are a wide variety of arrangements that local health departments employ for laboratory testing, ranging from the use of private labs, having their own labs onsite to use of the NJDOH PHEL. Nevertheless, in the case of an emergency, such as a bio-terrorism event or disease outbreak, when laboratory analysis response needs of a local health department exceed normal capacity of health department staff, the PHEL – within its existing capacity - is available to assist local health departments in identifying and responding to public health threats.