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## **Remarks by HHS Secretary Tommy G. Thompson at Press Conference Announcing HHS Emergency Response**

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Thank you for joining us here today during this very difficult period for the people of America.

I would like to update you on what the Department of Health and Human Services is doing to assist New York and the Washington, D.C., metropolitan areas in the wake of yesterday's terrorist attacks.

We have a long way to go, but we have begun the healing process in America by acting quickly and aggressively to help those in need. We began preparing when the first reports came in from New York, and we mobilized as soon as state and local officials let us know what they needed.

That is our role - to help state and local governments in any way possible. HHS medical personnel and support staff are on the ground, helping provide the initial care as we cope with this tragedy.

Now, let me detail what precisely we are doing.

From the moment we learned of these attacks, the Department of Health and Human Services began readying teams and resources to send to New York City and the Washington area to meet any needs of state and local officials.

We have worked closely with officials at all levels from the start. I have spoken several times with Governor Ptaki, Governor Gilmore and Mayor Guliani and have vowed to offer whatever assistance they need. They know more resources are only a phone call away.

Our Office of Emergency Preparedness has deployed 328 medical personnel from disaster readiness teams to Washington, D.C. and New York areas. The OEP also has deployed about 270 mortuary services personnel.

These men and women are part of the five disaster medical teams sent to New York City and three to the Washington-Northern Virginia-Baltimore area.

These medical teams each consist of physicians, nurses and emergency medical technicians, all trained to deal with traumatic injuries and other emergency needs.

We've also sent four Disaster Mortuary Operational Response Teams to New York and three to the greater Washington area.

We're also in the process of shipping literally tons of emergency medical supplies to New York City with the help of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. This shipment includes 84,000 bags of intravenous fluid, 400 ventilators, pharmaceuticals, emergency medication, and bandages and dressings.

We have activated the United States Public Health Service Commission Corps, which consists of approximately 6,000 health professionals. We also are giving backup assistance to the hospital ship Comfort from the United States Navy.

Working with America's blood banks, we have acted swiftly to ensure the quantity and quality of the blood supply in New York and the Washington area. Within moments of the first attack, I directed the National Institutes of Health to open its blood bank and stay open as long as needed. The response was overwhelming, as it has been at blood banks nationwide.

By Noon Wednesday, the blood drive was forced to close because NIH had collected all the blood that they can

store. Heavy turnout has been reported by the American Red Cross and at blood banks elsewhere in the country.

That speaks to the unmatched generosity of the American spirit.

The need for blood will be ongoing, however. I will issue bulletins about blood needs as they change. In particular, special needs remain for donors with type "O" and "RH Negative" blood types.

Please make an appointment to give blood -- if not this week, then next week -- so we can maintain a high blood supply in the coming weeks and months. You can contact the American Red Cross at 1-800-448-3543 and America's Blood Centers at 888-blood-88.

There have been concerns that there is not enough skin available for skin grafts for burn victims. State and local health officials have told us that so far there is an adequate supply for patients. We have acted to put tissue banks on notice to help out if more skin is needed in the future.

Questions also have been raised about the safety of the blood supply in this time of high demand. Let me assure you that America's blood supply remains safe. The FDA is working diligently to ensure a strong and quality blood supply in this time of vital need.

I would like to assure everyone: to our knowledge, no untested blood has been released to the public.

Additionally, there have been questions raised concerning health risks posed by bodies buried in the rubble of buildings, and this is a valid concern. HHS, led by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, is working with state and local officials to protect from water- and airborne health risks.

CDC has a team on the ground taking air, dust and water samples. This is of utmost concern to health officials. Also, Disaster Mortuary Operational Response Teams will ensure that the process of removing bodies is conducted as safely as possible, and identifications occur as efficiently as possible.

The heavy dust that has coated lower Manhattan following the attack also poses respiratory risks, particularly to our children and elderly citizens. We are well aware that New York has one of the highest childhood asthma rates in the nation, and CDC officials are working with New York authorities to conduct tests and protect our vulnerable residents from high levels of dust in the air.

Another concern resulting from the attacks is the threat of tetanus in remains of the buildings. We acted swiftly to ensure adequate amounts of tetanus vaccine was available.

We have supplied the vaccine to health officials both here and in New York, who say that adequate supplies are now on hand, including 50,000 does in New York City. And there is ample supply that can be sent if more is needed.

Also, we've reworked the Department's main web site -- [www.hhs.gov](http://www.hhs.gov) -- to include contact information for blood donations, as well as other information on how to get help or assistance related to this crisis. The site also has the latest information about our efforts to assist in the aftermath of this horrible event. We expect to update the web site regularly to provide timely and useful information to the public.

I would like to thank all of the millions of Americans and organizations across the country who have offered their support, including the American Hospital Association and the American Medical Association, which has heard from more than 1,000 doctors across America willing to volunteer.

And the National Medical Association has developed a rapid response team to assist in the crisis, and drug companies and medical supply companies have also been extremely generous.

Finally, we also are assisting if grief becomes too much to bear. Our Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration has set up a hotline -- 800-789-2647 -- to help those who need to talk, make it through the tough spots.

Make no mistake, we will get through this. As I mentioned earlier, we have already begun the healing process. We are Americans. We will persevere.

Last night, the President reminded us that, and I quote, "All Americans from every walk of life unite in our resolve for justice and peace."

And, he said, we will all "go forward to defend freedom and all that is good and just in our world."

Pursuing "all that is good and just" -- - that's the mission of HHS, and we will accept nothing less.

Thank you very much.

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