



## Virginia Rapid Response Team

### **Our Mission:**

The Virginia Rapid Response Team's mission is to provide a rapid unified multiagency all hazards response to food/feed emergencies in order to minimize the social, economic and public health impact.

### **History:**

In October 2009, the VDACS Food Safety Program was one of three states awarded a 3-year cooperative agreement from FDA to develop and sustain an all Food Hazards Rapid Response Team (RRT), encompassing both food and feed protection programs, through a process to further enhance and build the infrastructure of the State's food protection program. The desired outcome of RRT development is to minimize the time between agency notification of a human or animal food contamination event and implementation of effective control measures. To accomplish this, RRTs develop and maintain processes to:

- Prepare for and effectively respond to foodborne illness outbreaks and other food emergencies.
- Enhance intra-agency and interagency collaboration and communication.
- Jointly train and exercise staff to be ready to respond to events when they occur.
- Identify potential preventive practices to reduce foodborne illness and injury.

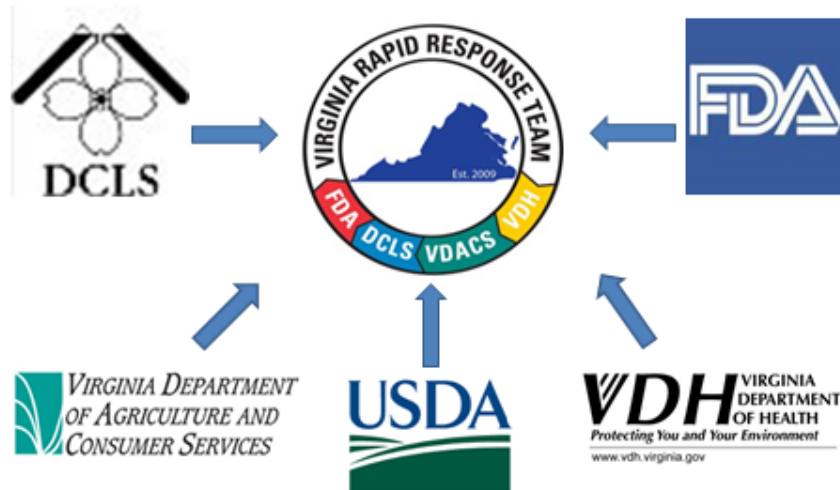
- Establish national best practices and tools that can be shared with other states to improve their response to food emergencies.
- RRT's operate using Incident Command System (ICS)/National Incident Management System (NIMS) principles and a Unified Command structure to respond to human and animal food emergencies.

For more information on Rapid Response Teams (RRTs), please visit [FDA's RRT website](#).

### **Membership:**

- Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services
  - Food Safety Program
  - Dairy Services Program
  - Agricultural Commodities Program
  - Office of Meat and Poultry Services
- Virginia Department of Health
  - Office of Epidemiology
  - Office of Environmental Health
  - Office of Shellfish Sanitation
- Division of Consolidated Laboratory Services
- U.S. Food and Drug Administration
  - Baltimore District Office
- United States Department of Agriculture
  - Food Safety Inspection Service

## VIRGINIA RAPID RESPONSE TEAM (VA RRT)



### Response:

**Rapid Response Teams** (RRTs) responses and activations show how strengthened collaboration and capabilities can have a meaningful impact on the efficiency and effectiveness of a response.

### Emergency response:

Through training, such as FDA coursework and table-top exercises, the Virginia RRT is prepared to respond to emergency events when they occur. Below are examples of responses the VA RRT has participated in:

- Collaborates in foodborne illness investigations
- Determines the safety of food products after vehicular accidents
- Responds to reports of employee illness at food establishments
- Investigates reports of illegally processed foods offered for sale
- Assesses the damage of foods in firms that manufacture, distribute or sell foods after disasters, such as fires, floods and emergency weather events

Additionally, the Virginia Rapid Response Team Members are trained to serve in the Emergency Operation Center during declared disaster situations.

## **Recalls:**

Food producers recall their products from the marketplace when the products are mislabeled or when the food may present a health hazard to consumers, such as a potential contamination or has caused a foodborne illness outbreak. Visit FDA's Recalls, Market Withdrawals & Safety Alerts section to view recent recall information by product area, including food, drugs, biological products, devices, and cosmetics.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) regulates beef, poultry, and processed egg products. Please visit FoodSafety.gov for food safety and recall information from both FDA and USDA.

## **Foodborne Outbreaks & Illnesses:**

While the American food supply is among the safest in the world, the Federal government estimates that there are about **48 million cases of foodborne illness annually** which is equivalent to sickening 1 in 6 Americans each year. Each year these illnesses result in an estimated 128,000 hospitalizations and 3,000 deaths.

Did you know that Food Borne Illnesses are usually not from food you consumed just before you became ill? Please visit the following links to learn more about Food Borne Illnesses:

- [Foodborne Illnesses: What You Need to Know](#)
- [Bad Bug Book \(Second Edition\)](#)

If you wish to submit a complaint concerning a foodborne illness, or conditions at a food manufacturer or retail store, please [report it here](#).

## **Virginia Food Protection Task Force:**

The Virginia Food Protection Task Force (VA FPTF) is a diverse group of professionals with government, industry, retail and academic affiliations. Their mission is “to serve Virginia by identifying and addressing food defense and food safety issues pertinent to the Commonwealth through stakeholder collaboration, communication, education and cooperation”. If you have any interest in becoming a part of the VA FPTF, please contact [Lauren Turner](#). The VA FPTF Executive Board is planning activities that are intended to engage members, provide avenues for participation in different initiatives, and encourage members to provide expertise in various food protection topics. Please visit [here](#) to sign-up for the quarterly newsletter and for updates on current activities.



## **Updates:**

The VA RRT has coordinated response, deployed investigators, sampled products and educated food handlers during several large foodborne illness outbreaks throughout the Commonwealth. The RRT has also coordinated surveillance and investigation sampling of high-risk foods for pathogens in order to protect public health. All sample results are entered into a national database in order to strengthen outbreak discovery and response.

Additionally, the VA RRT has helped fund two innovative projects. The first project was a Pandora Radio Campaign Ad broadcasted to increase public awareness of Hepatitis A (article included below). The second project, the MyMeal Detective, is a website consumers can access to submit reports of foodborne illness (article included below).

## **Virginia Hepatitis A Pandora Radio Campaign A Success Story of Interagency Collaboration**

September 13, 2019 3:34 PM by [Amy Bonsell](#) (Administrator)

The Virginia Department of Health (VDH) Foodborne Disease Epidemiology Team (FDET), in coordination with the Virginia Rapid Response Team (RRT) and Virginia Food Protection Task Force, partnered with Pandora Radio to develop a hepatitis A Pandora Radio Campaign that was broadcast in June of 2019. We developed three media images and a 30-second script which the Pandora Creative Team recorded. The recording and images were displayed when subscribers used or listened to Pandora Radio. The campaign had over 1 million impressions, or ad views, during the month. Concurrently, VDH recorded an increase of 198.6% unique views of the public facing VDH hepatitis A virus (HAV) landing page during the Pandora Radio Campaign. Overall, the hepatitis A Pandora Radio Campaign was a great success in highlighting interagency collaboration and increasing public awareness about HAV by providing education about how it is spread, signs and symptoms of infection, and how to reduce the transmission to the general public.

Pandora Radio is a music and podcast streaming internet radio service. A significant portion of Pandora listeners use the ad-supported version rather than pay for a subscription. The Virginia hepatitis A Pandora Radio Campaign utilized two different product methods, Audio Everywhere Ads and Mobile Display Ads, in order to increase the campaign's effectiveness.

The Audio Everywhere product reached the target audience by weaving the recorded audio advertisement seamlessly into the listening experience between songs and podcasts. The Mobile Display product worked by displaying a media image linked to a webpage when a listener interacts with their device, i.e.; adjusting the volume or skipping a song. The Mobile Display is an attention getting image that draws listeners in and allows them to click on the advertisement for more information. There were over 1 million impressions, or ad views, to the campaign during the month of June. The Audio Everywhere Ad was played over 695,000 times and the Mobile Display Ad was displayed over 404,000 times.

The different media images that were used for the campaign are shown below. Figures 1 and 2 were displayed when the Audio Everywhere message played. Figure 3, with the poop emoji, was displayed using the Mobile Display option which displays when a listener interacts with their mobile device, such as when skipping a song or adjusting the volume.

If you would like more information regarding the campaign or have any questions, please contact [foodborneepi@vdh.virginia.gov](mailto:foodborneepi@vdh.virginia.gov).

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## Virginia's Foodborne Illness Reporting System - My Meal Detective

April 19, 2019 2:04 PM [Amy Bonsell](#) (Administrator)

The My Meal Detective (MMD) was created by the Virginia Department of Health (VDH) in 2016. MMD is a public-facing website, managed by a state environmental health (EH) and epidemiology collaborative team, where consumers can easily report foodborne illness. The MMD survey form (housed on the VDH REDCap server) gathers demographic information, symptomology, and suspected source of illness from the complainant (i.e. a three-day food history). When a survey is submitted, the REDCap system sends an email alert to the MMD inbox for triage by EH staff who forward it to the appropriate local health district and the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS) Food Safety Program for follow up. A campaign to advertise MMD began in 2018 to promote the website through VDH social media and distribution of magnets with a QR code and MMD logo.

Since the creation of the MMD website in 2016, Virginia received over 900 online complaints of illness. From March through December of 2018, 520 illness complaints were received. Reports were received from complainants residing in twenty-one states and the District of Columbia. The majority of illness complaints received were from those who dined at a Virginia restaurant (N=438) followed by those who purchased food items from grocery or retail stores (N=46). MMD reports led to the identification of six foodborne outbreaks in 2018.

Implementation of the MMD website has improved Virginia's ability to receive, analyze and respond to foodborne illness complaints and identify foodborne outbreaks. The continued promotion and advertising of MMD will help raise awareness of the complaint system and educate Virginia consumers on the importance of food safety.



The Virginia Rapid Response Team (VA RRT) is a multi-agency response team composed of members from the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, Virginia Department of Health, Division of Consolidated Laboratories (state public health lab), United States Department of Agriculture Food Safety Inspection System, and the Food and Drug Administration Baltimore District Office Human and Animal Food 2 East. The mission of the VA RRT is to provide a rapid and multi-agency response to food and feed emergencies in order to minimize the social, economic and public health impact. The VA RRT works in cooperation to provide prevention and educational materials to industry and consumers. Recently, the RRT has provided funding to print and distribute QR code magnets to promote the My Meal Detective Direct Consumer Reporting Website.

Funding for the VA RRT and educational materials was made possible through Grant funding by the Federal Government, Food and Drug Administration, Department of Health and Human Services.



## RRT Updates 2022

The Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS) Rapid Response Team (VA RRT) partnered with the Virginia Department of Health's (VDH) Food and General Environmental Health Program and the Virginia Department of Emergency Management (VDEM) to develop and coordinate two Food Emergency Response Plan (FERP) Seminars. The FERP identifies the roles and responsibilities of leading and supporting agencies before, during, and after a food-related emergency affecting the Commonwealth of Virginia. The two seminars, "Food Emergency Response Plan In-depth Training for Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services and Virginia Department of Health Staff" and "Introduction of the FERP to the Virginia Emergency Support Team" were held on May 25, 2022, with 270 attendees at each seminar.


The VA RRT worked in cooperation with the Virginia Food Protection Task Force (VFPTF) to create and print posters for Hepatitis A Prevention for Food Workers. These posters are double-sided with translations in Spanish and Chinese. VDH's Food and General Environmental Health Program distributed the posters to food establishments.

The VA RRT worked in cooperation with the Virginia Food Protection Task Force to create, print and distribute a Plan and Checklist for Proper Cleanup of Vomit and Diarrhea Events. These were also translated in to Chinese and Spanish for distribution to food facilities by VDH Food and General Environmental Health Program Specialists and the VDACS Food Safety Specialist.

The VA RRT has activated for food emergency response and investigations total of five times in 2022. These team activations provide resources and collaboration among each of the agency programs during a food borne outbreak or national adverse reaction responses. The Rapid Response team conducted an After Action Review for each response to improve response capabilities and minimize the impact to

Help prevent the spread of

# hepatitis A virus



**Hepatitis A is a contagious liver infection caused by the hepatitis A virus.**

The virus is found in the stool and blood of people who are infected. Exposure to the hepatitis A virus may occur through direct contact with an infected person or by consuming food or drink that has been contaminated.

**Foodhandlers can transmit HAV before symptoms appear.**


Foodhandlers should always wash their hands thoroughly before beginning a new task and avoid bare hand contact with ready-to-eat food.

**Hepatitis A can be prevented with a safe & effective vaccine.**

Anyone not vaccinated against hepatitis A is encouraged to receive the vaccine.

**Stay home if you are experiencing the following:**

- Diarrhea
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Fatigue
- Fever
- Yellowing of skin or eyes
- Dark urine
- Light-colored stools
- Joint pain
- Stomach pain
- Not wanting to eat



Scan to learn more about hepatitis A.

**Handwashing plays an important role in prevention because those infected are most contagious before symptoms appear.**

This is a friendly reminder from the Virginia Rapid Response Team and Virginia Food Protection Task Force. The Virginia Rapid Response Team and Virginia Food Protection Task Force are funded through a grant awarded by the Food and Drug Administration.

