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PUBLIC CONFIDENCE IN GOVERNMENT, HEALTH CARE SYSTEM CONTINUES TO DROP AS 5TH ANNIVERSARY OF 9/11 APPROACHES

Survey respondents fear government is unprepared for terrorist attacks or natural disaster; health care system judged unable to respond to major crises or flu pandemic

(NEW YORK) – September 8, 2006 – On the eve of the fifth anniversary of the September 11th attacks, **the American public's confidence in the ability of the U.S government to protect them from terrorism, or respond to disasters or emergencies, has dropped to startling new lows**, according to a new study commissioned by the National Center for Disaster Preparedness (NCDP) at Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health and The Children's Health Fund (CHF).

The survey also showed that the majority of the **American public lacks confidence in the nation's health care system to be able to respond effectively to biological, chemical or nuclear attacks or a major outbreak of the bird flu.**

The survey separately polled Louisiana and Mississippi residents affected by Hurricane Katrina on preparedness issues and found them more ready for another natural disaster than the rest of America. New York residents, a third component of the poll, were found to be less prepared.

The survey was conducted in July and August by the Marist College Institute for Public Opinion as a follow-up to polls conducted annually since 2002 to identify trends and public attitudes related to the terrorist attacks of September 11 and disaster preparedness.

PUBLIC CONFIDENCE DROPS IN ALL AREAS

In the national survey, fewer than half – just 44 percent – said they were confident the government could protect them from a terrorist attack. That figure is a drop from 2005 (49 percent) and significantly less than 2003 (64 percent).

Only about one-third said they believed the government could protect public transportation (36 percent), U.S. shipping ports (36 percent), or U.S. borders (31 percent) from terrorism.

The **nation’s health care system also got a huge no-confidence vote** in the survey. Just over one-in-four of those polled (**28 percent**) **said they felt the health care system was ready to respond to terrorist attacks**, be they biological, chemical or nuclear. That was a drop from 2005 and 2004 (39 percent for both) and nearly half the number from 2002 (53 percent). Confidence was even lower when it came to a health crisis not related to terrorism. **Only 23 percent said the health care system was ready to respond effectively to a bird flu pandemic.**

Additionally, far fewer Americans (**38 percent**) **expressed confidence in Department of Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff** to do his job than they previously expressed for his predecessor, **Tom Ridge (65 percent in 2004).**

“These results show that the public is deeply concerned about the lack of readiness on a national and regional level for any large-scale disaster,” **said Irwin Redlener, M.D., director of the Mailman School’s NCDP and president of CHF. Dr. Redlener is also the author of the new book, “Americans at Risk: Why We Are Not Prepared for Megadisasters and What We Can Do Now,” published by Knopf,** which looks at how unprepared the nation is for future terrorist attacks and disasters. “If the public does not believe the government or the medical infrastructure is ready to deal with terrorism and natural disasters, they will not trust the directives and guidance given by those in charge. This can potentially mean chaos in emergencies. That is why we need significant changes in how our leaders address preparedness and communicate with the public.”

Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton commented, “In this post-9/11, post-Katrina world, when we face threats of terrorism, pandemic influenza, and other naturally occurring disasters and disease outbreaks, there is clearly so much more that needs to be done before we are prepared to face these threats. However, the public deserves to have confidence that their leaders are doing everything in their power to take the steps necessary to keep our families and our communities safe. We owe our citizens nothing less.”

DESPITE INCREASED FEARS, PUBLIC IS LESS PREPARED

Overall, the **American public is more concerned about terrorism, but less prepared than ever for it.** About **82 percent of the public now feel that the United States will experience more terror attacks, up from 78 percent in 2005 and 76 percent in 2004 and 2003.** Across the country, the concern is relatively equal. Despite this overwhelming concern, **no more than 33% of Americans are even minimally prepared for major terror-related disasters.**

In Louisiana and Mississippi, 68 percent of those polled said they were prepared for another natural disaster or emergency weather event. In fact, 77 percent said they were concerned they may be facing another disaster or emergency soon. However in New York, only 45 percent said they were ready for natural disasters and emergencies. When it came to terrorist attacks, about a third of all Americans (33 percent) and New Yorkers (34 percent) said they were ready.

The poll also showed that there are significant racial disparities in how Americans view the government and preparedness. African-Americans held far less favorable views on the topics covered, compared to Whites and Latinos. Just 36 percent had confidence in the government to protect them from terrorist attacks, as opposed to 44 percent for Whites and 49 percent for Latinos. Their confidence in government to respond to natural disasters was 43 percent, with Whites at 55 percent and Latinos at 62 percent.

Additional details on the survey are available at www.ncdp.mailman.edu. The full survey results are available upon request.

The national survey was conducted July 19 to August 7, with 1,207 adults interviewed. The survey has a margin of error of +/-3 percent. The Louisiana/Mississippi survey was conducted July 25 to August 7, with 614 adults interviewed, and has a margin of error of +/- 4 percent. The New York State survey was conducted August 7-16, with 1,008 adults interviewed. The margin of error is +/- 3 percent. Interviews were conducted in English or Spanish as necessary.

The National Center for Disaster Preparedness at the Mailman School of Public Health is an academically-based, inter-disciplinary program focused on the nation's capacity to prevent and respond to terrorism and major disasters. The NCDP provides curriculum development in bioterrorism, training for public health professionals and other first responders, development of model programs, a wide-ranging research agenda and public policy analysis around issues germane to disaster preparedness.

www.ncdp.mailman.edu

The only accredited school of public health in New York City, and among the first in the nation, **Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health** provides instruction and research opportunities to more than 900 graduate students in pursuit of masters and doctoral degrees. Its students and more than 270 multi-disciplinary faculty engage in research and service in the city, nation, and around the world, concentrating on biostatistics, environmental health sciences, epidemiology, health policy and

management, population and family health, and sociomedical sciences.

www.mailman.hs.columbia.edu

The Children's Health Fund, founded in 1987, is committed to providing health care to the nation's most medically underserved children through the development and support of innovative pediatric programs and the promotion of guaranteed access to appropriate health care for all children. To date, **The Children's Health Fund's** national network of 21 pediatric programs has treated more than 350,000 children. For more information visit www.childrenshealthfund.org.

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