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CRISIS OF CONFIDENCE:
SIGNIFICANT DROP IN AMERICAN PUBLIC'S CONFIDENCE IN THE
U.S. GOVERNMENT'S ABILITY TO PROTECT AGAINST AND RESPOND TO
A TERROR ATTACK

A New Study by The National Center for Disaster Preparedness at Columbia's Mailman School of Public Health and The Children's Health Fund Calls For New Measures to Address the Decline in Confidence and Refocus Preparedness Efforts

In Contrast, NYPD and FDNY Receive High Levels of Confidence Among Polled New Yorkers

(NEW YORK) – August 24, 2004 – Three years after the terrorist attacks of September 11, confidence in the federal government's ability to protect Americans has fallen to a crisis level—**dropping to 53% from 62% in 2003**—according to a new study from the National Center for Disaster Preparedness (NCDP) at Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health and The Children's Health Fund (CHF).

However, in contrast to the Federal government, the New York Police Department and Fire Departments received high levels of confidence among polled New Yorkers to effectively respond to a terrorist attack with the NYPD receiving 67% confidence and the FDNY receiving 76% confidence ratings.

NCDP and CHF commissioned a survey in July 2004 from the Marist Institute for Public Opinion as a follow-up to their 2003 study to identify trends and public attitudes related to September 11 and the war on terrorism. It is important to note that the 2004 survey was completed prior to the recent threat level elevation.

Dr. Irwin Redlener, director of NCDP and president of CHF, has proposed specific **recommendations for improving overall preparedness and communication.**

Key survey results about the lack of confidence include:

- **Three-quarters (76%) of Americans remain concerned about the possibility of terror attacks in the U.S., while the level of confidence in the government's ability to protect local areas has dropped to 53% from 62% in 2003.**

- **Only four in ten (39%) Americans are confident in the health care system's readiness to respond to a biological, chemical, or nuclear attack.** This is down from 46% in 2003 and 53% in 2002.
- Despite lower confidence in the U.S. health system's readiness to respond effectively to a biological, chemical, or nuclear attack, **nearly two-thirds (63%) of families nationally still do not have a basic emergency plan.**
- Although 61% of Americans are confident in the level of airport security, only **43% of Americans are confident in the government's ability to protect other public transportation including trains and buses from a terror attack.**

Key results about communication:

- **Fifty-nine percent of Americans will not evacuate immediately if directed to do so by officials.** The most prevalent reason for non-compliance (47%) is the desire to account for the whereabouts and safety of family or other dependents.
- **Forty-eight percent of parents are unaware of emergency preparedness plans at their children's schools.**
- **Only 21% of Americans are familiar with their community's terrorism response plan.**

Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton said, "We continue to hear that New York City remains one of the top terrorist targets in the nation and these survey results further support why I am calling for the immediate implementation of one of the most important recommendations of the 9/11 Commission: to provide an increase in terror funding for cities like New York and Washington, D.C. where the citizens face the most severe threat and risk of terrorism. The way to gain public trust in our ability to protect ourselves is to prepare, and we must have the necessary funds to do that." Senator Clinton added, "I commend the continued efforts of the Mailman School of Public Health at Columbia University and The Children's Health Fund not only to track people's attitudes about safety and their concerns about terrorism, but to encourage positive steps for improvement in this important debate."

"The challenge of preparedness in the age of international terrorism is virtually without parallel in our experience," said Dr. Redlener. "The recommendations that we have presented to Congress and others this week, provide immediate steps that will motivate the public to take seriously the notion of personal preparedness and improve confidence in government."

In addition to the data summarized in this release, more detailed information can be found in the white paper and/or letter to Congress, available on request from either **The National Center for Disaster Preparedness or The Children's Health Fund.**

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. 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.columbia.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 850 graduate students in pursuit of masters and doctoral degrees. Its students and nearly 250 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 a not-for-profit organization committed to providing medical care to the nation's most medically underserved population – homeless and disadvantaged children. To date, The Children's Health Fund's national network of 17 pediatric programs has treated more than 350,000 children. www.childrenshealthfund.org