What is APHL?
APHL is the national nonprofit representing governmental laboratories that protect the public’s health by detecting and monitoring health threats, such as the “H1N1” flu. Members include state, territorial and local public health labs; state environmental testing labs; state agricultural and food safety labs; and individual scientists, public health officials and academicians.

How do these ‘governmental laboratories’ help the American public?
Public health labs across the country work to detect, identify and monitor:

- Infectious disease outbreaks.
- Chemical contaminants in people and the environment.
- Foodborne illness clusters.

What else do they do?

- Screen newborns for genetic and metabolic conditions.
- Respond to natural disasters, industrial accidents and suspected biological, chemical or radiological terrorism.
- Support enforcement of water, food, dairy and environmental safety laws through testing.
- Monitor disease trends and develop new laboratory technologies.
- Contribute to the formulation of state and national health policies.

How does APHL support these labs?
APHL is the nexus for the country’s network of laboratories with public health mandates: a hub for information exchange among members and between the APHL membership and external partners. By linking these partners, APHL safeguards the public’s health. The association has longstanding relationships with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and other federal health agencies. In 1999, APHL, CDC and the FBI founded the Laboratory Response Network—an integrated group of public and private sector laboratories that function as laboratory first responders to terrorism, emerging infectious disease and other public health crises.

How does APHL contribute to the formulation of state and national health policies?
APHL bridges the gap between science and public health policy through its education and advocacy program. APHL is known in Washington, DC, as an authoritative voice on laboratory-related health issues, including emerging infectious diseases, human exposure to environmental toxicants, genetic testing, terrorism preparedness and others.

Why is ongoing laboratory training critical in public health labs, and how does APHL meet that need?
Not only are technological advances making older laboratory techniques obsolete, health threats themselves are evolving at a rapid rate. The cutting-edge science practiced in public health, environmental-testing and agricultural laboratories requires a highly trained and adaptable workforce. APHL has a 20-year history
as a provider of high quality education. While there are other continuing education providers, APHL fills a crucial niche by focusing on topics of fundamental public health importance. Some—like rabies testing—are addressed nowhere else. Each year, the National Laboratory Training Network—co-sponsored by APHL and CDC—delivers hundreds of courses to tens of thousands of scientists on topics ranging from parasitic diseases to chemical terrorism. APHL and CDC also cosponsor two fellowship programs.

Other than training, is APHL involved with public health laboratory workforce issues?
The US is in the midst of a severe shortage of laboratory scientists, a development that threatens the operations of public health laboratories. Alarmingly, the shortage is most acute for technical and managerial positions at the top of the career ladder. An entire cohort of highly trained government scientists is retiring while fewer students are entering the profession. The result is a serious leadership gap.

Anticipating this challenge, in 2003 APHL launched the National Center for Public Health Laboratory Leadership. Its mission is to attract new laboratorians into public health and to prepare current and emerging laboratory leaders with the skills needed to succeed in a rapidly evolving field.

What is APHL’s role in development of laboratory science and laboratory systems?
Science is the heart of the laboratory and an important focus for APHL. The association and its members routinely coordinate or collaborate in the development of new assays and testing algorithms to capitalize on scientific advances and to find alternatives to conventional methods when needed.

Because quality laboratory practice is APHL’s overarching goal, it supports the proven route to quality: a systems approach to laboratory practice that treats discrete functions and entities as part of a larger, integrated system. This applies equally to systems within individual laboratories, between partner institutions and across laboratory networks. APHL bolsters laboratory systems through model practices, research and network support.

Do APHL’s efforts stop at the US border?
Because our nation’s health is affected by global events, strengthening national laboratory systems worldwide is at the core of APHL’s mission. APHL’s Global Health Program, its largest initiative, works with national health systems in more than 20 resource-constrained nations in Asia, Africa, South America and the Caribbean to extend the reach of laboratory-based disease surveillance, advance in-country health objectives and reduce the burden of endemic diseases such as HIV/AIDS and TB. It develops and supports training programs, strategic planning, collaborations and other services to build the capacity and capability of national laboratory systems to provide accessible, quality testing services and support timely disease monitoring and response.

MORE INFORMATION
For more information on the Association of Public Health Laboratories, contact Jody DeVoll, 240.485.2753, jody.devoll@aphl.org; check our website www.aphl.org; read our blog www.aphl.org/lablog/Pages/default.aspx and follow us on Twitter http://twitter.com/APHL. To find out more about public health laboratories, view our fact sheet.

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