



**Department of Health
Queen Anne's County**

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Joseph R. Ciotola, M.D.
Health Officer

MEMORANDUM

TO: The Honorable James J. Moran, President
The Honorable Paul Comfort, Vice-President
The Honorable Steve Wilson
The Honorable Robert Charles Buckey
The Honorable Mark Anderson

FROM: Joseph A. Ciotola, Jr.
Health Officer

DATE: February 4, 2015

SUBJECT: Southern Kent Island (SKI) Areas of Public Health Concern

Public Health has two major objectives, treating outbreaks of disease and the prevention of illness. The Environmental Health component has the responsibility of proactive measures to inhibit disease transmission.

The Health Officer concurs with the Secretary of the Maryland Department of the Environment and the Environmental Health Director that the septic condition of South Kent Island now poses a substantial risk of disease transmission caused by inadequately treated wastewater coming in contact with humans and pets. In addition, this situation encourages insects which vector and amplify the risks.

This situation is in some ways parallel to a national problem now developing. Because measles had been almost suppressed, vaccination which is the method of prevention, began to lapse. The public little sensed the growing risk that accrued as the pool of unvaccinated grew. Recently, an outbreak occurred which spread with surprising aggressiveness. The situation on South Kent Island has its similarities because if a pathogen is introduced to this fertile environment, it could create a substantial outbreak with unexpected speed and virulence. It is wise to keep in mind that the great increases in health during the past century came from an understanding and meeting the risks of septic, water contamination, and insects. The current South Kent Island situation poses an increasingly risky circumstance that is exactly what led to contagions in the past. We are reestablishing this peril.

The County Health Officer is aware of 37 reported communicable disease cases in the Stevensville zip code in recent years that could have been caused by septic/sewage



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exposure. But it is not this rather muted history that is a concern. It is the unpredictability factored with a growing risk profile as the condition worsens, over time and seasonally. No one should take comfort from the lack of outbreak to this date, any more than the absence of measles last year was any indication of this year's national health experience. We cannot predict with accuracy the likelihood of exposure or disease outbreak. But in our opinion, it would take little, perhaps only one infected person, to set off a very destructive run of events. The introduction of cholera to an unprotected septic environment like that which occurred in Haiti is example enough. In our opinion, corrective action is required to address this public health threat to the citizens.

Cc: Gregg Todd, County Administrator
Todd Mohn, Director, Department of Public Works
Allan Quimby, Sanitary Engineer
John Nickerson, Environmental Health Director