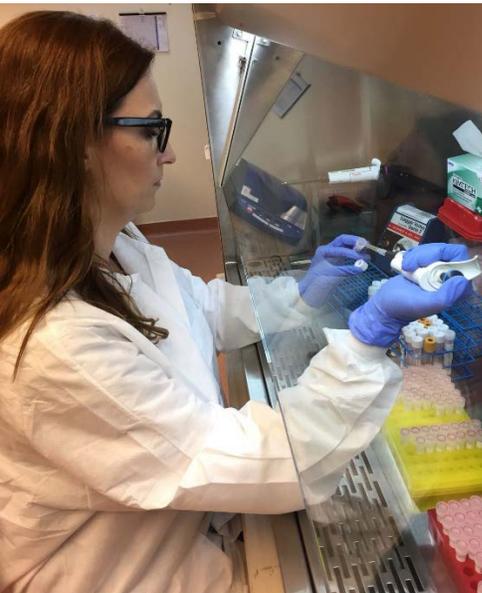


Atanaska Marinova-Petkova, DVM, MS, PhD

My childhood dream of becoming a physician evolved into a veterinarian role, after realizing the potential for a broader impact on public health. As a veterinarian, I discovered my passion—protecting both animals *and* humans against microorganisms (germs) that can cause dangerous diseases—and I felt an unwavering commitment to contribute to public health.

When working in CDC's Influenza Division, I felt closer than ever to my dream of working in public health, and this is also when I learned of the Laboratory Leadership Service (LLS). What was most appealing to me about LLS was the ability to apply innovative approaches and my previous work experience to address real-world public health problems on behalf of CDC.



Dr. Atanaska Marinova-Petkova prepares patient specimens to test for arboviruses and leptospirosis in St. Croix, U.S. Virgin Islands.

“LLS has given me the most amazing hands-on opportunities to expand my expertise, polish my leadership skills, and fulfill my dream of impacting public health.”

My research career began at the National Veterinary Service in Bulgaria where I spent seven years performing routine diagnostics and conducting research studies on avian influenza viruses that posed significant threats to human health. My collaborations with scientists from St. Jude Children's Research Hospital led me to the United States to continue my work in this field as a postdoctoral researcher. I worked in high biocontainment facilities with different animal models and studied highly pathogenic H5N1 influenza viruses from across the world. These data were used by the World Health Organization to formulate recommendations for pandemic influenza vaccines and preparedness.

My two-year journey as an LLS fellow began in 2017 when assigned to CDC's Bacterial Special Pathogens Branch in the Zoonoses and Select Agent Laboratory. I had the most amazing hands-on opportunities to expand my expertise, polish my leadership skills, and fulfill my dream of impacting public health. I led anthrax laboratory capacity-building activities in Cameroon where I trained laboratory scientists on anthrax molecular diagnostics for human and animal health. I then developed an autoclave inactivation method for *Bacillus anthracis* (the causative agent of anthrax) to be used in combination with molecular diagnostics in low-resource countries, allowing laboratory staff to work safely without handling the live agent. It is a particularly helpful approach for laboratories lacking the necessary biosafety equipment to work with *B. anthracis*.

Another highlight of my LLS fellowship was participating in an outbreak investigation of the first reported cases of leptospirosis and melioidosis in the U.S. Virgin Islands (USVI), following Hurricanes Irma and Maria in 2017. I worked closely with CDC and USVI epidemiologists to implement local surveillance of these diseases. This collaboration helped us find additional cases of leptospirosis and determine potential risk factors.

My LLS experience as a whole empowered me with the tools and a platform to impact public health. The LLS program and network have opened new doors for my career and allowed me to meet and learn from influential public health leaders within and outside of CDC. I am thrilled to be serving as a Senior Biologist in CDC's National Center for HIV/AIDS, Viral Hepatitis, STD, and TB Prevention.



Dr. Atanaska Marinova-Petkova demonstrates setting up of real-time polymerase chain reaction for detection of anthrax at the Pasteur Center in Yaoundé, Cameroon.

Learn more about LLS at
www.cdc.gov/LLS