



## Bioterrorism and Public Health

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### **Public health plays a critical part in responding to the bioterrorism threat.**

The United States is not immune to a covert biological terrorist incident.

The traditional tools of public health would be the first to detect an infectious agent released to harm Americans.

In 1999, CDC was charged to lead an effort to upgrade the nation's public health capacity to respond to bioterrorism at the local, state and federal level.

In the effort to reduce U.S. vulnerability to biological and chemical terrorism, much has been done, but much more must yet be done.

### **A biological terrorist event will unfold differently than a terrorist explosion or chemical release.**

Expect a delay between the covert release of a biological agent in a public place and onset of illness.

Doctors or emergency rooms may be the first to identify the first casualties. By that time terrorists may be far away.

With some infectious diseases, only a short window of opportunity will exist between the time the first cases are identified and a second wave of the population becomes ill.

During that brief time, public health officials will need to determine that an attack has occurred, identify the organism, and prevent more casualties.

### **Responding to large-scale outbreaks caused by biological agents will require robust public health preparedness at the local, state and federal levels.**

Early detection and response are crucial.

The U.S. public health disease surveillance and response system is variable in its capabilities today.

Early detection requires a level of knowledge among medical care-givers about possible biological terrorist agents. This is a must because they are in the best position to report suspicious illnesses.

Early detection requires access to a communication system between doctors and public health

officials.

The U.S. needs more capacity to investigate unusual events and laboratories that can quickly identify biological and chemical agents now rarely seen here.

**We must prepare public health agencies for biological attacks.**

More well-trained disease detectives with the ability to detect and respond to biological attacks are needed to speed detection and response.

Laboratory capacity—well trained lab workers and needed supplies—will speed diagnoses.

Secure, reliable and swift communication channels will ensure early detection and rapid response.

We must go back to school—medical providers and public health officials must become familiar with symptoms and signs of diseases rarely or never seen in the United States that could be used as biological weapons.

The nation must strategically stockpile drugs, medical supplies and vaccines needed to support local supplies that could be quickly overburdened by a large-scale biological or chemical event.

**Preparedness and prevention requires numerous partners and increased planning and resources.**

Detection, diagnosis, and further prevention of illness is a complex process following covert biological terrorist events.

CDC provides leadership, guidelines, and technical expertise to states and communities.

Resources invested in preparing for a biological or terrorist event strengthen the public health system's ability to detect and respond to emerging infectious diseases that occur naturally—also an important public health responsibility.