

ESP FOCUS

Biological Threats



Terrorists may use various weapons to threaten or harm people. Some weapons, like localized bombings, can injure small numbers of people but gain lots of publicity. Other types of weapons can harm large numbers of people over a longer time frame. These are

sometimes called Weapons of Mass Destruction or WMD for short. These weapons can be biological, chemical, radiological, nuclear or explosives.

A biological attack is the deliberate release of germs or other substances, which are called biological agents. To become sick from a biological agent, a person must eat or breathe it, or it must enter the bloodstream through an open cut in the skin. Some biological agents, such as anthrax, do not cause contagious diseases. Others, like the smallpox virus, can result in diseases you can catch from people.

A biological attack may not be immediately obvious. While it is possible that the terrorist may announce an attack for the publicity, it is more likely that local health care workers will gradually identify and report a pattern of unusual illnesses.

Government agencies, public health authorities, and health care providers have developed detailed plans to identify, investigate and respond to biological attacks. You will probably learn of the danger through an emergency radio or television broadcast.

TAKE ACTION

Check out the other side of this sheet for practical, affordable and useful things you can do for yourself, your family, your neighborhood and your co-workers. These simple steps may help you balance protection with peace of mind.

LEARN MORE

Knowledge is power. The more you know about biological threats, the better you can protect yourself and your family.

CHECK THESE WEBSITES

- www.bt.cdc.gov (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)
- www.whitehouse.gov/homeland (United States Department of Homeland Security)
- www.hopkins-biodefense.org (Johns Hopkins University Center for Biodefense Studies)
- www.labt.org (Los Angeles County Department of Public Health)
- www.redcross.org (American Red Cross)
- www.ci.riverside.ca.us/fire (City of Riverside Fire Department)



M A Y

www.espfocus.org

WHAT YOU CAN DO NOW

- Assemble and maintain an emergency supply kit.
 - See the *March 2004 ESP Focus* (Update Emergency Supplies)
- Have a plan to contact all family members if something happens during the work day. Public Health or other authorized agencies will use the news media to release information and instructions to protect your health.
- Keep good records:
 - Medical history of family members
 - Dates of inoculations
 - Prescriptions and allergies
 - Other medical needs
- Have a current list of important telephone numbers:
 - Physician
 - Out-of-town contact
 - Work or school contact for family members
- Use good personal hygiene to avoid spreading germs:
 - Wash your hands often
- Think about your pets:
 - Have current shot records
 - Find out about sheltering sites
- Always stay alert to your surroundings:
 - Tell authorities if you see any unusual or unattended parcels or suitcases
 - Pay attention to unusual behavior, incidents, or smells

WHAT YOU CAN DO IN CASE OF AN ATTACK

If you become aware of an unusual or suspicious release of an unknown substance nearby:

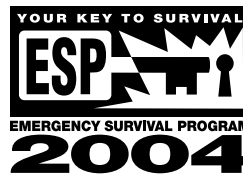
- Remain calm.
- Get away from the substance as quickly as possible.
- Cover your mouth and nose with layers of fabric that can filter the air but still allow you to breathe.
- Wash with soap and hot water and contact authorities.

If a biological emergency is declared in your area:

- Listen for official news and instructions:
 - The signs and symptoms of the suspected illness
 - The groups or areas that authorities consider to be in danger
 - Plans for distributing medications or vaccines
- Be especially alert to signs of illness, but do not automatically assume that any illness is the result of the attack.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water.
- If you think you have been exposed to a biological agent, seek medical advice.
- Listen to the radio or television for official instructions, and follow them carefully.
- Don't believe or spread rumors.

Official instructions might include:

- Evacuate: Authorities may tell you to leave your house and go to a safer area. In this case, take your emergency kit, identification, keys, and pets.
- Shelter in Place: Stay exactly where you are (your house, workplace or even car), and close windows, doors and vents until it is safer to breathe the outside air.



This focus sheet is produced as part of the Emergency Survival Program (ESP). ESP is an awareness campaign designed to increase home, neighborhood, business and school emergency preparedness. ESP was developed by the County of Los Angeles. The California Governor's Office of Emergency Services (OES) and representatives from Imperial, Inyo, Kern, Los Angeles, Mono, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, San Diego, San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara, Santa Cruz, and Ventura counties, Southern California Edison, the Southern California Earthquake Center and the American Red Cross assist in the development of campaign materials and coordination of the campaign.