

BIOTERRORISM

Biological agents are organisms or toxins that can kill or incapacitate people, livestock, and crops. A biological attack is the deliberate release of germs or other biological substances that can make you sick. There are three basic groups of biological agents that could likely be used as weapons: bacteria, viruses, and toxins. Biological agents can be dispersed by spraying them into the air, person-to-person contact, infecting animals that carry the disease to humans, and by contaminating food and water.

Before a Biological Threat

A biological attack may or may not be immediately obvious. In most cases, local health care workers will report a pattern of unusual illness or there will be a wave of sick people seeking emergency medical attention. The public would be alerted through an emergency radio or TV broadcast, or some other signal used in your community, such as a telephone call or a home visit from an emergency response worker.

The following are things you can do to protect yourself, your family, and your property from the effects of a biological threat:

- Build an Emergency Supply Kit
- Make a Family Emergency Plan
- Check with your doctor to ensure all required or suggested immunizations are up to date for yourself, your children, and elderly family members.
- Consider installing a High-Efficiency Particulate Air (HEPA) filter in your furnace return duct, which will filter out most biological agents that may enter your house.

During a Biological Threat

The first evidence of an attack may be when you notice symptoms of the disease caused by exposure to an agent. In the event of a biological attack, public health officials may not immediately be able to provide information on what you should do. It will take time to determine exactly what the illness is, how it should be treated, and who is in danger.

Follow these guidelines during a biological threat:

- Watch TV, listen to the radio, or check the Internet for official news and information, including signs and symptoms of the disease, areas in danger, if medications or vaccinations are being distributed, and where you should seek medical attention if you become ill.
- If you become aware of an unusual and suspicious substance, quickly get away.
- Cover your mouth and nose with layers of fabric that can filter the air but still allow breathing. Examples include two to three layers of cotton, such as a t-shirt, handkerchief, or towel.
- Depending on the situation, wear a face mask to reduce inhaling or spreading germs.
- If you have been exposed to a biological agent, remove and bag your clothes and personal items. Follow official instructions for disposal of contaminated items.
- Wash yourself with soap and water and put on clean clothes.
- Contact authorities and seek medical assistance. You may be advised to stay away from others or even quarantined.

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During a Biological Threat Cont.

Follow these guidelines during a biological threat:

- If your symptoms match those described and you are in the group considered at risk, immediately seek emergency medical attention.
- Follow instructions of doctors and other public health officials.
- If the disease is contagious, expect to receive medical evaluation and treatment.
- For non-contagious diseases, expect to receive medical evaluation and treatment.
- In a declared biological emergency or developing epidemic, avoid crowds.
- Wash your hands with soap and water frequently.
- Do not share food or utensils.

After a Biological Threat

Pay close attention to all official warnings and instructions on how to proceed. The delivery of medical services for a biological event may be handled differently to respond to increased demand.

The basic public health procedures and medical protocols for handling exposure to biological agents are the same as for any infectious disease. It is important for you to pay attention to official instructions via radio, television, and emergency alert systems.

Visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website, www.emergency.cdc.gov/agent/agentlist.asp, for a complete list of potential agents/diseases and appropriate treatments.