

PREPARING FOR TERRORISM

There are many bacterial, viral, toxic, chemical and radiological substances that could be used as weapons against human beings. Although many of these agents are difficult to deliver into an unsuspecting population, it is still a remote possibility when faced with an educated and well-funded terrorist organization. It's much more likely that an industrial or transportation related accident involving one of these substances could occur.

The federal government has drastically increased efforts to detect and disrupt acts of domestic and international terrorism... and has provided significant funding to state and local response organizations to prepare for the effects of such attacks. Washtenaw County's Homeland Security Task Force, Bioterrorism Committee, Hazardous Materials Response Team, Local Emergency Planning Committee, and many other organizations are actively working to enhance our response systems and procedures.

Having an educated public, however, is the most effective form of preparedness. All Americans should understand the basics about Weapons of Mass Destruction ("WMD") and hazardous materials protective actions, especially if they work or live near major roads, industrial facilities, and other large institutions.

BIOTERRORISM

Bioterrorism is the intentional or threatened use of viruses, bacteria, fungi or toxins from living organisms to produce death or disease in humans, animals or plants. There are over 400 agents listed as possible agents of bio-terrorism. Some examples include Smallpox, Anthrax, Botulism, and Plague. The effects of these organisms vary, as does the medical treatment and community response protocol.

When the nation's Public Health surveillance system detects an outbreak, several systems are activated. Certified laboratories confirm the agent, state and local public health officials begin to track down the source or point of release, potentially exposed members of the community are identified and treated if necessary, and the public is kept informed as the investigation progresses. At the first hint of a potential act of terrorism, appropriate law enforcement agencies are immediately involved.

Keeping your immune system strong is the best single defense against disease, including acts of bio-terrorism. A healthy diet, regular exercise and sufficient sleep goes a long way in helping your natural immune system, which makes it more difficult for viruses and bacteria to take hold and thrive. Washing your hands with soap and warm water regularly, especially before and after meals, is also a very good defense.

There is no need to purchase a gas mask. For complete protection with a gas mask, it would need to be worn all day, every day. The best way to protect yourself during potential bio-terrorism or chemical incidents is to stay informed and follow official instructions.

There is no need for smallpox or anthrax vaccinations and it is not necessary to store or stockpile any prescription medication. You would be notified through the media if dispensing emergency medications becomes necessary. Fortunately, many types of illnesses that could be caused by bio-terrorism are treatable, and emergency stockpiles of medications are ready to go at a moments notice.