

BIOLOGICAL TERRORISM

There are specific biological substances that harm or kill people, animals and plants. Bacteria, viruses and toxins—the main types of potential biological “agents”—occur in nature but can be altered to increase their ease of dispersion, potency or resistance to medicines.

Most biological agents are hard to grow and sustain. Many die when exposed to the environment, but others, like anthrax spores, are hardy. They can be spread by spraying them into the air, contaminating food and water or infecting animals that carry disease to humans. Many must be inhaled, eaten or absorbed through a skin cut to make you sick; some cause contagious diseases.

Biological agents can be hard to detect, and their effects may be delayed. A biological attack could come without warning, and the danger may not be immediately recognized. The first alert may be from health care workers noting an unusual pattern of illness. Your first warning would likely be an emergency broadcast or some other signal used in your community.

How to Prepare

Advance precautions for bioterrorism are limited:

- Stay healthy—Eat sensibly, get enough rest, exercise and practice good hygiene.
- Ensure that all required and recommended immunizations are up to date. Children and the elderly are especially vulnerable to biological agents.
- Consider installing a high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filter in your furnace return duct or using a stand-alone portable HEPA filter. These can filter out most biological agents that may enter your house.
- Get an emergency supply kit, and learn about recommended breathing filters.
- Make a family emergency plan.

What to Do

- In the event of a biological attack, it may take a while to determine the nature of the threat, who is at risk and the best steps to take. Watch TV, listen to radio or check the Internet for reliable information about areas in danger, signs and symptoms and the nature and location of available assistance.
- Try to stay in an indoor location where the air is filtered.
- If you notice a suspicious substance, move away, put on a breathing filter, wash with soap and contact authorities.



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What to Do (Continued)

- **If you are exposed** to a biological agent—
 - Use common sense. Be alert for symptoms, but don't panic.
 - Put on a suitable breathing filter if instructed to do so.
 - Remove clothes and personal items, bag them and follow official instructions for disposal.
 - Wash with soap, and put on clean clothes.
 - Practice good hygiene.
 - Seek medical attention. Medical treatments are available for some biological threats. You may be advised to stay away from others.
- In most biological emergencies or epidemics, it is best to stay away from crowds where others may be infected.
- **If someone is sick**, practice good hygiene—
 - Wash hands with soap frequently.
 - Don't share food or utensils.
 - Cover the mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing.
 - Consider breathing filters for patients, caregivers and others.

Where to Find Additional Information

- Live radio and TV broadcasts will have the most current information on bioterrorism events and the appropriate actions to take.
- Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)—
 - <https://www.ready.gov/biological-threats>
 - <https://www.ready.gov/document/be-informed-biological-threat>
 - <https://www.ready.gov/sites/default/files/documents/files/biological.pdf>
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)—
<http://www.cdc.gov/anthrax/bioterrorism/index.html>
- American Red Cross—<http://www.redcross.org/prepare/disaster/terrorism>
- Ready Army—www.ready.army.mil

It's up to you. Prepare strong. Get an emergency supply kit with enough supplies for at least three days, make an emergency plan with your family and be informed about what might happen.

