

Bioterrorism

Bioterrorism is the intentional release of harmful bacteria, viruses, or germs.

Bioterrorists aim to injure or kill people, cause panic, and disrupt our daily lives.

What are the most likely agents that will be used in a biological attack?

Although it is unknown what agents will be used in a biological attack, several have been identified as potential weapons. The agents with the greatest potential for use in a biological attack are classified by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention as “Category A” agents because of their high potential to harm people and cause fear and panic. The “Category A” agents are: Anthrax, Smallpox, Plague, Botulism, Tularemia, and Viral Hemorrhagic Fever.

What other agents may be used in a terrorist attack?

Conventional weapons such as explosives have been the most common form of terrorism in American history. Terrorists may also try to use chemical and radiological substances to cause harm.

How will I get information in the event of a terrorist attack?

Government officials will instruct the public on what actions to take after an act of terrorism. The Emergency Alert System (EAS) will be activated and broadcast over radio, television and the Internet. The Kalamazoo County Health & Community Services Department website (www.kalcounty.com) will be updated continuously with important information after such an event if it takes place in Kalamazoo County.

Who will respond to a bioterrorist attack?

The initial responders in a bioterrorist attack will include local public health departments, local Emergency Medical Services, law enforcement, fire and FBI.

What should I do to prepare?

Bioterrorism can be obvious or concealed. Nevertheless, there are things that you can do to anticipate for the unexpected. Such things include:

- Being aware of your surroundings and
- reporting suspicious activities to your local law enforcement agency.
- Being informed about terrorism and possible agents that may be used for bioterrorism.
- Having a family preparedness plan.

What should I consider in a family preparedness plan?

A family preparedness plan may include the following:

- An emergency communication plan.
- Since local phone lines are likely to be overloaded, an out-of-town or state contact person will help maintain contact with family members. Ensure that the whole family has the contact person’s information such as a phone number, an e-mail address, cellular phone or pager number.
- An alternate meeting place. A predetermined meeting place will decrease confusion should your area be evacuated.
- Putting together a disaster preparedness kit. In critical times, vital services may be disrupted for up to 72 hours.

**Kalamazoo County Public Health
Emergency Information Line:
269-373-5300**

How can I help my children cope in the event of such an emergency?

Try to maintain your daily routines as much as possible. Be honest and open about the disaster, but keep information age-appropriate.

When do I evacuate a building?

Evacuate whenever a fire alarm sounds, if you see or smell fire or smoke, or you have been instructed to do so by emergency personnel. Leave the building immediately if any of these situations occur. Do not assume that it is a false alarm. Remember that the building may need to be evacuated for reasons other than fire (chemical spills, violence, bomb threat, etc.)

What should I do if I suspect an exposure to a biological agent?

Public health officials may not be able to provide information right away about a biological attack. It will take some time to determine what agent was used and who is in danger. Meanwhile, there are things that you can do to protect yourself. Stay informed by watching TV, listening to the radio or using the Internet for official news concerning the following:

- Where the agent was released
- Who is affected
- Whether to evacuate or shelter-in-place
- Whether or not medications or vaccines are distributed
- Where to find medical attention should you become sick

What should I do if I suspect an exposure to radiation?

Try to limit your exposure to the radiation. A shield between yourself and the radioactive materials will absorb the radiation and therefore decrease the radiation you are exposed to. The farther away you are from the site of release and fallout, the lower the radiation exposure. The lesser the time spent in the area of release, the lesser risk for absorbing the radiation.

What should I do if I suspect an exposure to a chemical agent?

If you think you may have been exposed to a chemical, remove clothes immediately and wash with soap and warm water making sure not to scrub the chemical into your skin. Seek medical attention right away.



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