

OVERVIEW

A biological attack is the deliberate release of germs or other biological substances that can make you sick. Many agents must be inhaled, enter through a cut in the skin or be eaten to make you sick. Some biological agents, such as anthrax, do not cause contagious diseases. Others, like the smallpox virus, can result in diseases you can catch from other people.

If There is a Biological Threat

Unlike an explosion, a biological attack may or may not be immediately obvious. While it is possible that you will see signs of a biological attack, as was sometimes the case with the anthrax mailings, it is perhaps more likely that local health care workers will report a pattern of unusual illness or there will be a wave of sick people seeking emergency medical attention. You will probably learn of the danger through an emergency radio or TV broadcast, or some other signal used in your community. You might get a telephone call or emergency response workers may come to your door.

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. However, you should watch TV, listen to the radio, or check the Internet for official news including the following:

- Are you in the group or area authorities consider in danger?
- What are the signs and symptoms of the disease?
- Are medications or vaccines being distributed?
- Where? Who should get them?
- Where should you seek emergency medical care if you become sick?

During a declared biological emergency:

1. If a **family member becomes sick**, it is important to be **suspicious**.
2. **Do not assume**, however, that you should go to a hospital emergency room or that any illness is the **result of the biological attack**. Symptoms of many common illnesses may overlap.
3. Use common sense, practice good hygiene and cleanliness to **avoid spreading germs**, and **seek medical advice**.
4. Consider if you are in the group or area authorities believe to be in danger.
5. **If your symptoms match** those described and you are in the group considered **at risk**, immediately seek **emergency medical attention**.

If you are potentially exposed:

1. Follow instructions of doctors and other public health officials.
2. If the disease is **contagious** expect to receive **medical evaluation and treatment**. You may be advised to stay away from others or even deliberately **quarantined**.
3. For **non-contagious** diseases, expect to receive **medical evaluation and treatment**.

If you become aware of an unusual and suspicious substance nearby:

1. **Quickly get away.**
2. **Protect yourself**. **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. Otherwise, several layers of tissue or paper towels may help.
3. **Wash** with soap and water.
4. **Contact authorities.**
5. Watch TV, listen to the radio, or check the Internet for **official news and information** including what the signs and symptoms of the disease are, if medications or vaccinations are being distributed and where you should seek medical attention if you become sick.
6. **If you become sick seek emergency medical attention.**