



# **BIOTERRORISM**

# Bioterrorism

Biological agents are organisms or toxins that can kill or disable 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 spread by spraying them into the air, person-to-person contact, infecting animals that carry the disease to humans and by contaminating food and water.

The effects of the bioterrorism attack can be severe and widespread, depending on the type and amount of the biological agent used, as well as the method of dispersal. Symptoms of a biological attack can range from mild flu-like symptoms to severe illness or even death.

## Before a biological threat:

A biological attack may or may not be immediately obvious. In most cases local healthcare workers will report a pattern of unusual illness or there will be a wave of sick people seeking emergency medical attention. You would be alerted through an emergency radio or TV broadcast or a telephone call from an emergency response worker. Please ensure that the message you receive is validated. AfriForum always sends validated messages.

The following messages only create panic:

- A message sent out with no company name.
- A message sent out with no person's name or credentials.
- The message is not factual.
- No reply address or contact details are attached to the message.

## To prepare:

- Assemble an emergency supply kit.
- Create a family emergency plan.
- Check with your doctor to make sure everyone in your family has up-to-date immunisations.
- Consider installing a high-efficiency particulate absorbing (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 figure out exactly what the illness is, how it should be treated and who is in danger.

## **During a 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 to seek medical attention if you become ill.
- If you become aware of a 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 to quarantine.
- If your symptoms match those described and you are in the group considered at risk, immediately seek emergency medical attention.
- Follow the instructions of doctors and other public health officials.
- Avoid crowds.
- Frequently wash your hands with soap and water.
- Do not share food or utensils.

## **After a biological threat:**

Pay close attention to all official warnings and instructions on how to proceed. Medical services for a biological event may be handled differently due to increased demand.

The basic procedures and medical protocols for handling exposure to biological agents are the same as for any infectious disease.

