

# Ten Critical Steps for Handling Possible Bioterrorist Events

## 1 Maintain an index of suspicion.

In an otherwise healthy population, some associations are very suggestive, especially when seen in clusters, high numbers, or unusual presentations.

<b>Hemoptysis</b>	Plague
<b>Flaccid Paralysis</b>	Botulism
<b>Purpura</b>	Viral Hemorrhagic Fevers (VHF)
<b>Wide mediastinum</b>	Anthrax
<b>Centripetal rash</b>	Smallpox

## 2 Protect yourself and your patients.

Use appropriate personal protection equipment (PPE). Prophylaxis: vaccines, if available; or antibiotics, if risks are known.

## 3 Adequately assess the patient.

Review and assess the patient's history. Also, ask:

- Are others ill?
- Were there any unusual events?
- Was there an uncontrolled food source or other environmental factor?
- Was there vector exposure?
- Has the patient been traveling?
- What is the patient's immunization record?

Perform a physical examination with special attention to the respiratory system, nervous system, skin condition, and hematologic and vascular status.

## 4 Decontaminate as appropriate.

**Do not** use bleach on exposed people. Soap, water and shampoo are perfectly adequate for all biological and most chemical agents. Chemically contaminated clothes should be removed and discarded safely. Biologically contaminated clothes can be laundered with soap, water and, perhaps, bleach.

## 5 Establish a diagnosis.

Think clinically and epidemiologically; always send specimens for culture.

### Symptom (individuals)

Pulmonary  
Neuromuscular  
Bleeding/purpura  
Rash (various types)  
Flu-like symptoms

### Possible Diagnosis

Tularemia, plague, staph enterotoxin B (SEB)  
Botulism, Venezuelan equine encephalitis (VEE)  
VHF, ricin, plague (late)  
VHF, T2 mycotoxin, smallpox, plague  
Varies

### Immediate Symptoms (large numbers)

Pulmonary  
Neurologic

### Possible Diagnosis

SEB, mustard, Lewisite, phosgene, cyanide  
nerve gases, cyanide

### Delayed Symptoms (large numbers)

Pulmonary  
Neurologic

### Possible Diagnosis

Biologic agents, mustard, phosgene  
Botulism, VEE, other encephalitis

## 6 Render prompt treatment.

Doxycycline can be used to treat virtually everything (**except virals or toxins**) while awaiting lab results. Observe pediatric precautions as appropriate.

## 7 Provide good infection control.

Gown, gloves, mask and handwashing, and eyewear if necessary, are sufficient.

Recommended isolation precautions for biologic agents include:

<b>Standard Precautions</b>	For all individuals/patients
<b>Contact Precautions</b> (herpes, etc.)	Viral Hemorrhagic Fevers
<b>Droplet Precautions</b>	Pneumonic Plague and Tularemia
<b>Airborne Precautions</b>	Smallpox

## 8 Alert the proper authorities.

### Agency

FBI  
518-465-7551 (Albany)  
212-384-1000 (New York City)  
716-856-7800 (Buffalo)

Municipal Police/County Sheriff

New York State Police

County Health Unit

New York State Health Department

518-473-1730

(518-465-9720/after hours)

Local Emergency Medical Services Unit

Local Hospitals

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 770-488-7100

## 9 Assist in the epidemiologic investigations so as to determine who may be at risk.

Steps in an epidemiologic investigation:

- Count cases;
- Relate to the at-risk population;
- Make comparisons;
- Develop hypotheses;
- Test hypotheses;
- Make inferences;
- Conduct studies;
- Interpret and evaluate.

## 10 Know and spread this information.

Adapted with kind permission from a lecture by Dr. Ted Cieslak, Colonel, US Army

New York State Department of Health  
Bureau of Communicable Disease Control