

ANTHRAX... Did you know?

- In 2001, the U.S. suffered a multi-site, two-wave lethal anthrax attack matriculated through the US Postal Service. Five Americans died, several were sickened and tens of thousands were prescribed antibiotics with or without vaccine to save their lives. Even now the preeminence of anthrax as a threat continues...
 - In December 2008, the bi-partisan Commission on the Prevention of WMD Proliferation and Terrorism stressed the importance of enhancing the nation's capabilities for rapid response to prevent biological attack – particularly with anthrax.¹ On October 21, 2009, the Commission restated these concerns and asserted anthrax is the most likely near-term threat.²
 - In a September 2008 memo Homeland Security Secretary Chertoff urged HHS Secretary Leavitt, "to employ all relevant emergency powers under 21 U.S.C. Section 360bbb-3 to ensure distribution of pre-need countermeasures that may be effective in preventing the contracting of anthrax by people in the delivery chain, such as: US Postal Service Workers; to first responders, including law enforcement; to essential government and non-government workers; and to the general public."
 - "Based on a credible risk that the threat of exposure to *Bacillus anthracis* and the resulting disease constitutes a public health emergency.", HHS Secretary Leavitt responded on October 1, 2008 with a Declaration under the Public Readiness and Emergency Preparedness [PREP] Act. This action provides targeted liability protection for the use of all anthrax countermeasures (including the vaccine) and compensation to eligible individuals for covered injuries from covered countermeasures.
 - And on June 3, 2009, the Washington Times reported that Abdullah al-Nafisi, an Al Qaeda recruiter, confirmed the threat in a February 2009 speech wherein he proclaims... "Four pounds of anthrax -- in a suitcase carried by a fighter through tunnels from Mexico into the U.S. -- are guaranteed to kill 330,000 Americans within a single hour... It will turn into a real celebration."³
- Strategically-placed detection devices, while helpful, are not the solution. These monitor continuously but most analyze data only once an hour. This means in a medium-sized USPS Processing & Distribution Center handling 5 million letters, 500 000 flats, and thousands of parcels a day, as many as 230,000 potentially contaminated pieces could whisk through to carriers before an alarm sounds. Irradiation of mail is limited to facilities in Ohio and New Jersey and mail addressed to the White House, Congressional offices, and federal government offices in 202-205 Zip Code exchanges.⁴
- Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) is useful but not fool-proof either. In the October 2001 Hart Senate Office building attack on Senator Daschle's office, 6 of 9 emergency responders were infected before they donned their HAZMAT suits.⁵ Anthrax powder quickly dissipates into the gaseous phase and is odorless, tasteless and invisible. This makes discerning the safe zone nearly impossible.
- The solution is not post-exposure antibiotics for 60 - 100 days (with or without vaccine) because the prudent action is to plan for weaponized anthrax that is resistant to all antibiotics stored in the Strategic National Stockpile (SNS).^{6,7} Antibiotics do not kill the spore form of anthrax.⁸ And it is very difficult to adhere to long courses of antibiotics due to side effects as was the case for victims of the 2001 attacks.⁹
- Therefore, pre-exposure immunization with SNS vaccine doses is the best strategy since the immunity obtained by vaccination will protect against anthrax that is antibiotic-resistant. But vaccination must be given pre-attack to allow time for the vaccine to confer immunity.¹⁰
- The anthrax vaccine is FDA-licensed as safe and effective.¹⁰ The Institute of Medicine has stated that the rate of adverse events for this vaccine is similar to rates with other adult vaccines (Influenza, HAV, Tetanus).^{11,12} The vaccine protects against anthrax disease inflicted by both antibiotic-sensitive and antibiotic-resistant organisms.¹³ And over 8.7 million doses have been administered to more than 2.2 million military/civilian personnel.

ANTHRAX... What to do?

According to the CDC Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP), voluntary, pre-exposure immunization with the anthrax vaccine is recommended for "persons involved in emergency response activities including but not limited to, police departments, fire departments, hazardous material units, government responders, and the National Guard."¹⁴ And SNS vaccine is the most expeditious source for this strategy.

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