

# Bioterrorism

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Bioterrorism al Affiliation Bioterrorism The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) defines bioterrorism as “ the deliberate release of viruses, bacteria, or other germs (agents) used to cause illness or death in people, animals, or plants” (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2007, par. 1). From historical accounts, it has been revealed that traces of bioterrorism could have occurred in the 1990s, specifically in the latter part of 1992 when the following incidences were noted: “ the epidemic of over 400, 000 cases of waterborne cryptosporidiosis in Milwaukee, the outbreak of severe, unexplained acute respiratory disease now known as hantavirus pulmonary syndrome in the Spring of 1993, the nationwide foodborne salmonellosis outbreak caused by contaminated ice cream that accounted for an estimated 250, 000 cases in the fall of 1994, and the increasing problems posed by antimicrobial-resistant organisms in community and health-care settings” (Hughes, 1999, par. 2). The article written by Tucker (1999) has revealed that most of the biological agent cases turned out to be hoaxes. As explicitly revealed, “ of the terrorist attacks with biological agents, only one resulted in casualties: the use by the Rajneeshee cult in 1984 of Salmonella Typhimurium bacteria to contaminate restaurant salad bars in The Dalles, Oregon. This event caused 751 cases of food poisoning, none fatal” (Tucker: Conclusion, 1999, par. 1).

Despite the differences in findings, the government has obviously been keen on evaluating, monitoring, and assuming a proactive stance in addressing terrorist attacks, especially involving biological agents (Hughes, 1999).

According to the Homeland Security, a national biodefense program has been put into place to address threats of biological agents (Homeland Security, n. d.). It was therefore disclosed that as part of the intensified need

to address threats of bioterrorism, the Homeland Security has been assigned to establish four pillars of the defense program, to wit: “ Threat Awareness; Prevention and Protection; Surveillance and Detection; (and) Response and Recovery” (Homeland Security, n. d., p. 1).

As part of the government’s public health policy, close coordination and collaboration with state and federal health agencies are encouraged, especially in examining potential biological threats. As emphasized, “ intelligence analysts and biodefense experts at the National Biological Threat Characterization Center conduct studies and laboratory experiments, filling in information gaps to help us better understand and counteract current and future biological threats” (Homeland Security, n. d., p. 1). Another established agency, the National Biosurveillance Integration Center, was tasked with the rapid identification of biological threats to pre-empt any potentials for national concern (Homeland Security, n. d.).

Likewise, at the state level, it was noted that the Model State Emergency Health Powers Act (MSEHPA) was established for the primary purpose of early detection and appropriate response to current and future biological threats (Martin, 2004). In terms of early detection, Martin (2004) reported that public health agencies and health institutions are named forerunner of information to alert the necessary authorities, especially with potential biological threats. Likewise, when the threat was found to be evident, these state agencies are entrusted to develop emergency response actions. It was emphasized that “ after a governor declares a public health emergency, she may suspend any regulatory statute if strict compliance with such laws would “ prevent, hinder or delay necessary action” to respond to the threat. The public health authorities coordinate the state’s response to the

emergency, and the state legislature can terminate the state of public health emergency at any point” (Martin: The Substance of the MSEHPA, 2004, par. 2).

Overall, the collaborative efforts of state and federal agencies assist in addressing biological threats in an evolving and continuing basis to ensure the protection of the public and prevent injuries, illnesses, or fatalities, as required.

### References

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