Bioterrorism Agents

Bioterrorism agents are typically biological materials, such as germs (*bacteria*) or viruses used in acts of warfare against a country or group of people.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) categorize biological agents according to the risk they pose to the public. Those that pose the highest risk, because they can be easily disseminated and could result in high *mortality* (death rate), are classified as Category A. These agents include bacteria, such as:

- Anthrax.
- Botulism.
- Plague.
- Tularemia.
- Viruses, such as variola that cause smallpox, and those causing hemorrhagic fever, including hantavirus and ebola.

The use of chemical agents as weapons of war is also a threat. The CDC classifies these into the following categories:

- Blister agents.
- Blood poisoning.
- Lung damaging.
- Incapacitating.
- Nerve agents.
- Riot control/tear gas.
- Vomit inducing.

There are no reliable tests available at this time to screen people who think they may have been exposed to a bioterrorism agent. There are no rapid tests of infection for any of the Category A agents. Until recently, there has not been a perceived need for them.

The U.S. government as well as the research community and industry are working to develop methods to protect people against agents like anthrax that could be used in a bioterrorist attack.

Information courtesy of CDC. In times of an emergency, much of this material may not apply when it comes to specialized care and testing. These are guidelines to help you when that care is not available.

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