



FACT SHEET

Questions and Answers About Bioterrorism

What is bioterrorism?

Bioterrorism is the intentional use of infectious biological agents, or germs, to cause illness.

Is our water supply safe from bioterrorism?

Most bioterrorism experts agree that reservoirs are an unlikely target for bioterrorists. Methods already in place to filter and clean the drinking water supply are considered effective against most biological agents. Chlorine, for example, protects drinking water from other water-borne bacteria and would neutralize most biological agents. Additionally, the large quantity of water in the water supply would significantly dilute a biological agent, limiting its potential to do harm. Security measures have been increased.

Is there anything specific that Greenwich residents can do to prepare for a possible attack?

The best way for a family to be safe is to be as prepared as possible before any disaster strikes. Consistent with long-standing guidelines on disaster preparedness, families can plan to provide necessities for themselves for a 3- to 4-day period, in the event that they have to remain inside their home for their safety.

The Greenwich Department of Health, along with other government agencies and health institutions, will do everything possible to protect public health. If an incident occurs in Greenwich, the public would be informed immediately through the news media of measures that should be taken to protect their health. If antibiotics or vaccines were recommended, instructions would be provided on where the emergency clinics would be established throughout the town.

Where should citizens turn for instructions in the event of a chemical or biological disaster?

Local, state, and national public health, public safety and emergency management officials would be the most reliable sources of information. As soon as the circumstances are understood, these officials will call press conferences to convey accurate information and instructions to the public. Subsequent press conferences will be called as frequently as possible to update the public about the steps that local, state, and federal government organizations are taking to address the situation and what individuals can do to help themselves and their fellow citizens.

Should Greenwich residents stockpile antibiotics to protect themselves against bioterrorism?

The Department strongly recommends against stockpiling antibiotics, as the use of antibiotics in the absence of evidence indicating a bioterrorist attack is not without risk. Inappropriate use of antibiotics may cause the development of antibiotic-resistant strains of common bacterial diseases. In addition, using antibiotics without a doctor's prescription may cause serious adverse reactions including: diarrhea, abdominal symptoms, rash, allergic reactions, and potentially dangerous interference with other

medications. Individuals who stockpile antibiotics would also be more likely to use expired medications. Additionally, stockpiling could lead to shortages of national supplies for routine or emergency use.

A large stockpile of pharmaceuticals - including antibiotics that are effective against the most likely bacterial bioterrorist agents - has been amassed by the federal government and would be rapidly available for distribution in the event of a bioterrorist attack.

Should citizens buy gas masks?

Various news reports have noted that citizens are opting to purchase gas masks as a way to defend against chemical or biological terrorism. Local merchants have also advertised an available supply. There are several important factors:

In order for a mask to protect you against a *chemical* weapons attack, you would need to carry the mask with you at all times---24 hours a day, 7 days a week---and be prepared to put it on immediately when the gas or chemical releases. To guard against a *biological* attack, you would not only need to carry the mask, but also wear it at all times, since the presence of biological agents is not obvious without advanced sensors. They are not designed to provide protection against biological agents. Gas masks must be fitted properly for your face so the “one size fits all” mask will not be effective. Improper use of gas masks can cause serious injury or even death, especially among persons with underlying heart or lung disease. With that being said, it will be an expensive purchase that will have no use.

What if my fears about bioterrorism are having a serious impact on my family and work life?

After the World Trade Center attacks on September 11th and the recent incidents of anthrax infection, it is reasonable for individuals to feel anxious about their personal safety. If your fear grows to the point that it stops you from doing the things that you would normally do, it might be helpful to talk with a professional counselor. Your healthcare provider can make a referral, or you can call one of the following service agencies:

State of Connecticut - Statewide	(866) 284-3577
Greenwich Hospital Outpatient Psychiatric Center	(203) 863-3316
American Red Cross	(203) 869-8444
Kids in Crisis Helpline	(203) 327-KIDS
Family Centers Inc	(203) 324-3167
Council of Churches and Synagogues - Regional	(203) 348-2800
Child Guidance Center	(203) 324-6127
Info-Line	211
United Way of Greenwich	(203) 869-2221