

Emergency Preparedness

On Tuesday, April 8th, the Montgomery County Health Department will be closed for the day. The staff of the Montgomery County Health Department will be participating in a multi-agency emergency preparedness drill. The drill is being conducted at the Health Department. This drill will test our emergency operations plans to ensure our preparedness in case of a true public health emergency. Many lessons will be learned during the drill and many partnerships will be strengthened as a result. We look forward to more drills as they allow us to update and make changes to our plans as unique emergency situations arise.

Bioterrorism: Frequently Asked Questions

How real is the threat of bioterrorism?

We cannot know how likely it is that a terrorist will use biological weapons against our general population and we have no evidence that Montgomery County would be a target of bioterrorism. However, we do know that the technology to produce and use dangerous biological agents is potentially available to people who might be willing to use them. Because the consequences of such an attack could be severe, we need to be prepared to respond as quickly and effectively as possible.

What is being done about the threat of bioterrorism?

The best defense against bioterrorism is a strong public health department. In response to the threat of bioterrorism, Congress authorized the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to coordinate efforts to upgrade national public health capability to counter bioterrorism. Following this mandate, the CDC establishes the Bioterrorism Preparedness and Response Program in 1999. Under this program, resources have been allocated to strengthen our capacity to detect, communicate and respond to potential bioterrorism events.

Should we be spending all of this money on bioterrorism when we have other immediate health needs?

The effects of bioterrorism are so potentially devastating, that we need to do all we can to prepare for a possible attack. However, most of what we do to strengthen our public health department against bioterror attacks also strengthens our ability to respond to emerging infectious diseases like SARS, West Nile Virus, other diseases, and other health emergencies.

What can I do to protect my family and myself?

Many of the same steps you would take to prepare yourself and your family for a natural disaster such as a flood or major storm would also be helpful in preparing for an incident of bioterrorism. For instance, making plans for getting in touch with family members after a disaster and preparing emergency kits for your home, work, and your children's schools are simple things

you can do. You should recognize, however, that some preparedness items or actions that could prove more valuable in some emergency situations might not be useful in the special case of bioterrorism. Bioterrorism is different from terrorist attacks that involve explosives or chemicals. The Montgomery County Health Department has an important responsibility for helping protect Montgomery County residents against outbreak of infectious disease, whether they occur in nature or because of a terrorist act. That is why we will be closed on Tuesday, April 8th as the staff is tested on how to respond in the event of an emergency. We apologize for any inconvenience this may cause. We want to be ready to take care of you and your family. ■