

EMERGING HEALTH CARE INITIATIVES AT TDH

Public Health Bioterrorism Preparedness

The Anthrax incidents of October and November, 2001 made it abundantly clear that the United States was at risk for acts of biological terrorism. The response throughout the country has been a major effort to become prepared to confront such incidents to reduce the morbidity and mortality associated with those acts. Because such acts are most likely to be clandestine and covert, the development of an effective syndromic surveillance program was essential. There is an Epidemiologist in each of the health regions in Tennessee now conducting syndromic surveillance. In the event of a suspected event, the Epidemiologists are prepared to initiate active surveillance and intervention to reduce the morbidity and mortality which could result. Each region also has acquired an Emergency Response Coordinator and a Network Technical Specialist to assist in developing a robust, redundant communication system. As part of these initiatives there has been an increase in training for health care practitioners throughout Tennessee, and the establishment of drug and vaccine supplies to respond to such an event. There is also a major effort to enhance the ability to communicate with hospitals, EMS, law enforcement, the Tennessee Emergency Management Agency, the Department of Homeland Security and other agencies whose involvement in responding to an event is essential. There has been a major effort to prepare for a smallpox event by vaccinating nearly 2,500 health care providers to act as a first line of defense in responding to such an event. A number of TDH staff have received training in risk communication; and the state laboratory has developed the capability to identify a number of the potential bioterrorism agents and continues to expand those capabilities. In addition, there is close cooperation between the bioterrorism efforts of public health and the state's hospitals in developing preparedness programs. During the last two years Tennessee has made major strides in efforts to prepare for bioterrorist threats and acts.

Hospital Bioterrorism Preparedness Program

The Health Resources and Services Administration Tennessee Hospital Bioterrorism Preparedness Program is also being successfully implemented to prepare Tennessee hospitals to respond to a bioterrorism incident or other outbreaks of infectious diseases. A Hospital Bioterrorism Preparedness Survey was conducted in 2002 and completed on January 25, 2003 by 100% of all hospitals. In 2002, Tennessee was divided into six hospital regions based on the normal referral patterns of hospitals to the Regional Referral Centers. During March and May 2003, six multidisciplinary health care planning groups composed of representatives from hospitals, public health, primary care, Emergency Medical Services and other healthcare and governmental agencies successfully developed a Regional Hospital Bioterrorism Plan with six annexes to address the different requirements in each of the hospital regions. Six bioterrorism tabletop exercises will be conducted in July and August 2003 to test the plan and make the final changes to the Hospital Bioterrorism Plan. Based on the survey and the regional planning activities, the Hospital Bioterrorism Program will be disbursing a significant portion of the FY 2002 \$2.4 million grant to hospitals to help them better prepare to respond to a bioterrorism incident.