

## 4. Bioterrorism

Health care providers become first responders during a bioterrorist attack. As horrific as potential scenarios might be, the medical community will save many lives if we prepare now with lots of hands-on training and simulations.

**Bioterrorism agents are likely to cause acute outbreaks of unusual syndromes, or they can present common illnesses in the “wrong” season or geographic area.**

**If you can check one or more boxes in both categories at right ...**

**Phone HSA’s Disease Control Unit immediately!**

📞 **454-4114** workdays

📞🕒 **471-1183** hotline  
off hours, weekend, & holidays

**Public Health Lab**

📞 **454-5445**

for specimen submission.

### Averting panic

If you suspect bioterror, recognize the possible **psychological impact** of premature public disclosure of your findings.



Limit discussion with your staff on a **need-to-know** basis so they can prepare your organization and your day’s patients. When you call us with your report, do so in private. After all, we all hope it turns out to be a false alarm.

Please do not talk to the media, but refer them to HSA officials.

If you maintain a **calm demeanor**, so will your associates and patients. Battling a bioterror agent is work enough without the complications of rumor or hysteria.

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**Early detection and reporting of BT symptoms by astute clinicians will minimize casualties.**

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### Syndrome

- Acute severe pneumonia or respiratory distress
- Encephalopathy
- Acute onset neuromuscular symptoms
- Unexplained rash with fever
- Fever with mucous membrane bleeding
- Unexplained acute icteric syndromes
- Massive diarrhea, dehydration, and collapse

### Setting

*Atypical host characteristics:*

- Patients <50 years old
- Immunologically intact
- No underlying illness
- No recent travel or unusual exposure

*Serious, unexplained, acute illness:*

- Abrupt onset
- Prostration
- Cardiovascular collapse
- Respiratory distress
- Obtundation
- Change in mental status
- Disseminated intravascular coagulation

*Multiple cases with same symptoms, especially if:*

- Geographically associated
- Closely clustered in time

*Out of season syndromes, such as:*

- Influenza-like illness during summer

*(based on Zebra Pack bioterrorism kit prepared by Santa Clara County)*