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Public health emergencies:
 What you can do to prepare.

MAKE A KIT MAKE A PLAN STAY INFORMED
 MAKE A PLAN STAY INFORMED MAKE A KIT
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Rhode Island Department of Health

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September 2004

Dear Rhode Islander:

The world seems less predictable than it did just a few years ago. In addition to natural threats, like storms and the flu, armed conflict is occurring in several places across the globe. Terrorists threaten to strike both here and abroad.

Rhode Island has a long history of responding well to threats and disasters—whatever the cause. Now we have to draw on that strength and prepare ourselves, once again, to deal with the unexpected.

This booklet describes what the Rhode Island Department of Health (HEALTH) and its partners are doing to prepare for public health emergencies. It also contains information on:

- How to assemble an emergency kit for your home;
- How to make a plan to stay in touch with your family in an emergency;
- Three kinds of terrorist attacks and what to do if one happens; and
- Emotional reactions to traumatic events and how to deal with them.

Preparing for one kind of emergency also helps us get ready for other kinds. We suggest that you read this booklet, follow its recommendations and keep it in a handy location—just in case.

Protecting our health is everyone’s top priority. With the information in this booklet and a little preparation we can all help to assure a safe and healthy future.

Patricia A. Nolan, MD, MPH

Patricia A. Nolan, MD, MPH
 Director, RI Department of Health

WHAT THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND ITS PARTNERS ARE DOING TO PREPARE

Efforts are underway to ensure the health and safety of Rhode Islanders in the event of a major public health emergency such as a biological, chemical or radiological attack. While an attack is not expected, Rhode Island is preparing to respond quickly in order to:

- Protect the health and safety of those who are affected,
- Limit the spread of illness if it is contagious, and
- Keep the public informed.

Many of these efforts make us better prepared for other events, such as a disease outbreak like the flu or SARS, as well as for an industrial accident, such as a chemical spill.



The Department of Health is working with several partners, including: the Rhode Island Emergency Management Agency; state and local police and other emergency responders; city and town officials; and hospitals to prepare to respond to major public health emergencies. In a major emergency, emergency responders will be available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Here is an overview of some of the things the Department of Health and its partners are doing.

Training doctors and emergency responders

- The number of regional Hazardous Material (HAZMAT) and Terrorism Response Teams has been increased.
- Doctors and other health care providers are being trained to recognize and report the early signs of unusual sicknesses.
- Federal and state funds are being provided for the most up-to-date equipment and training.

Preparing to care for large numbers of sick people

- Hospitals are training staff to prevent the spread of diseases, and are setting up areas where people can be treated if they are exposed to bacteria, chemicals or radiation.
- The Department of Health has vaccinated a group of health care providers against smallpox so they are protected and can vaccinate others if necessary.
- Cities and towns are planning how to distribute vaccines and medications to people in their communities, if necessary.

◀ Warehouse with mock supplies during an emergency medication distribution exercise in Rhode Island.



Creating community emergency plans and communication networks

- Emergency plans are being updated and/or developed in cities and towns, schools and childcare centers, state agencies and other institutions such as colleges and universities.
- Communication networks are being built so that town leaders and others can communicate quickly in an emergency.
- Hospitals are meeting monthly to coordinate plans for handling large numbers of patients.

Increasing security around possible terrorist targets

- High-risk targets are being identified to assess where additional security is needed.
- Security is being increased around reservoirs and food supply sources to prevent terrorists from contaminating food and water.

Cranston (RI) HAZMAT team conducting a training exercise. ►



HOW YOU CAN PREPARE

There are three simple things you can do now to prepare yourself and your family for an unexpected emergency, including a terrorist attack.

1. **Make a Kit**
2. **Make a Plan**
3. **Stay Informed**

Set aside a few hours to go over these steps, assemble your kit and write down your communication plan.

Take the time to prepare. Your health and the health of your family members are too important to be caught unprepared in a major emergency.



Make a Kit

Prepare an emergency kit. Your kit should contain everything you and the members of your household may need for at least 3 days. If you are forced to leave your home or if you cannot leave your home, your kit will provide essential needs to help protect your family's health and your own.

- Food for each person (non-perishable, no cooking needed)
- Water for each person (1 gallon per person per day)
- Infant formula if you have a baby
- A change of clothing for each person
- Blankets or a sleeping bag for each person
- First Aid Kit (including adhesive tape, antiseptic ointment, bandages of different sizes, cold pack, rolled gauze, scissors and tweezers)
- Battery-operated radio
- Flashlight
- Batteries for radio and flashlight
- Small tools (e.g. utility knife, pliers, can opener)
- Copies of important documents (such as birth certificates, naturalization documents, licenses, passports) in a waterproof container
- A list of medical conditions, prescriptions and allergies for all household members with special medical needs and at least a 3-day supply of all medications
- Supplies and equipment for household members with special needs
- Pet supplies (including food and water, leashes, carriers and records of shots)

If you need to evacuate:

- Follow the directions given by officials.
- Take your emergency kit with you.

If you need to evacuate you may need to take your emergency kit with you. Assemble as much of your kit as possible in a large, easy-to-carry bag. Make sure that the rest of the items are in your home and are easy to gather

quickly. Remember to check your kit regularly and replace any items that go bad over time, such as food and batteries.

Make a Plan

1. Make a plan to stay in touch with your family.

- Choose an out-of-state contact such as a relative or friend. In an emergency, local phone lines may be busy. It may be easier to make a long distance call than to make a local call. Your out-of-state contact can help you get in touch with any family members you cannot reach.
- Make sure every member of your family knows the phone number of your out-of-state contact and has a way to make a long distance phone call at all times (e.g. prepaid phone card or a cell phone).

2. Decide on a place to meet if you are separated from your family.

- If your family is not together when an emergency happens, watch TV or listen to the radio to find out whether you should go home, evacuate to another location, or stay where you are (“shelter-in-place”).
- Pick a meeting place in advance that is away from your home and neighborhood in case it is not safe to meet at home.

- Pick a backup meeting location in case travel to the first choice is not possible.
 - If an emergency occurs when your children are in school or childcare, it may be safer for them to stay there temporarily.
 - As you develop your plan, consider any family members with special needs (e.g. impaired physical or mental abilities).
 - Include your pets in your plan. Ask friends or relatives outside your area whether they could shelter your pets in an emergency, or contact hotels and motels to inquire about their pet policies.
- ### 3. Know emergency plans. Ask about the emergency plans of your:
- Children’s schools and childcare providers.
 - Workplaces.
 - City or town.

If you need to shelter-in-place:

- Stay where you are (home, school, office, or other location).
- Follow instructions from emergency officials.

See the inside back cover of this booklet for a family emergency plan template.



Stay Informed

- In an emergency, listen to your radio or watch TV for news and instructions. Officials will tell you what to do. The box on page 11 provides information on what to do in any emergency.
- Read the next section of this booklet to learn about emergencies caused by terrorist attacks, including:
 - » What they are,
 - » What to look for, and
 - » What to do if such an attack occurs.

If you have any questions about planning for health emergencies, please call the Rhode Island Department of Health's Family Health Information Line at 1-800-942-7434.



What to do in any emergency

- Stay calm.
- Stay informed. Listen to your radio or television for news and instructions.
- Follow the instructions from emergency officials.
- If the emergency occurs near your home and officials allow you to go there, check your home and property for damage using a flashlight.
- If you have gas service in your home, smell for gas leaks, starting at the water heater. **Do not** light matches or candles, or turn on electrical switches. If you smell gas or suspect a leak, get everyone (including pets) outside quickly to a safe location. Leave all doors and windows open.
- Call your out-of-state contact and tell them where you are staying. Do not use the telephone again unless there is a life-threatening emergency. Phone lines will be needed by emergency officials.
- Check on your neighbors, especially those who are elderly or disabled.
- Keep your pets in a safe place.

INFORMATION ON EMERGENCIES CAUSED BY TERRORIST ATTACKS

Making a kit and a plan are steps that will help you deal with both natural and intentional emergencies. While both types of emergencies can cause destruction, the purpose of intentional emergencies like terrorist events is to produce fear and general distress in the community.

Terrorists could use biological, chemical, or radiological weapons in an attack. In the next pages of this booklet, you will learn the differences between these types of attacks and their potential effects on health, including:

- Definitions of biological, chemical, and radiological substances,
- Signs that a biological, chemical, or radiological attack may have occurred, and
- What to do if an attack occurs.



Biological Attack

A biological terrorist attack, also called bioterrorism, is the intentional release of germs or other biological substances that can make you sick.

- Smallpox and plague are examples of diseases that terrorists could use to make a large number of people sick. These diseases can be spread from one person to another.
- Biological substances come in many forms including powder (e.g. anthrax) and aerosol spray (e.g. botulism).
- Biological substances can enter your body in different ways. Some can make you sick if you inhale them. Other substances can enter your body through a cut on your skin or by being swallowed.

Examples of biological substances include:

- Anthrax
- Botulism
- Plague
- Ricin
- Smallpox
- Tularemia

How will I know there has been a biological terrorist attack?

- Unlike an explosion, it could take hours or days to learn that a biological attack has taken place.
- An attack may be discovered when local health care workers see a pattern of unusual illness or when a large number of sick people with the same symptoms seek emergency medical care.
- The Department of Health and other agencies will use radio and TV to notify you if there is a biological terrorist attack.

What should I do in the event of a biological attack?

- Watch TV, listen to the radio, or check the Internet for official news including:
 - » Where the attack took place.
 - » The signs and symptoms of the attack and how you could become infected.
 - » Where you should seek emergency medical care if you develop symptoms.
 - » Information on where and when medications or vaccines are being distributed to treat exposed people, if necessary.
- If you or a family member are exposed to the danger and your symptoms match those described by officials, follow the instructions given by officials.
- If you see a suspicious substance:
 - » Move as far away from the substance as possible.
 - » Do not touch or smell the substance. If you do, wash the areas of your body that were exposed to the substance with soap and water.
 - » Protect yourself. Cover your mouth and nose with two or three layers of fabric that can filter the air. Examples include a t-shirt, handkerchief or towel.
 - » Call 911 if you believe emergency officials have not yet been notified.

Getting special medications in an emergency

- The Department of Health may distribute special medications such as antibiotics and/or vaccines in an emergency situation, if necessary.
- Officials will use radio and television to give instructions about where to get special medications.
- Bring your list of medical conditions, prescriptions and allergies when you go to the location where medications are being distributed.



Rhode Island physician analyzes a sample at the Center for Biodefense and Emerging Pathogens laboratory at Memorial Hospital, Pawtucket RI.

Biological Substance Example: Smallpox

What is smallpox?

- Smallpox is a serious disease caused by a virus. The last human case of smallpox occurred in 1977. However, there is concern that smallpox virus kept for laboratory research could be obtained and used by terrorists.

How is smallpox spread?

- Smallpox is spread through coughs and sneezes, direct skin contact with an open wound or infected sores, and contaminated bed linens or clothing.
- People with smallpox are more likely to infect others during the first week of illness.

Symptoms

- Between 7 and 17 days after exposure, an infected person usually develops high fever, fatigue, headache and backache.
- A rash usually appears on the mouth, face and forearms and then spreads to the chest and stomach.

Prevention and Treatment

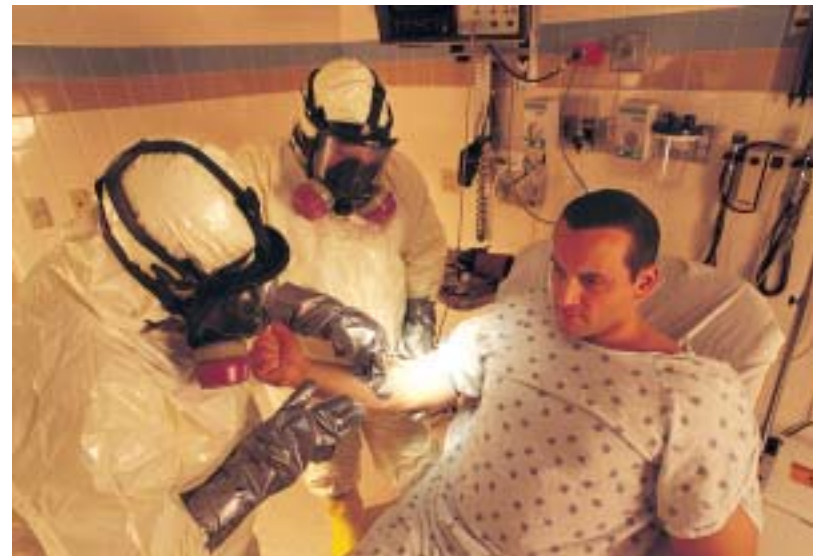
- The immediate vaccination of people exposed to smallpox can prevent the disease or reduce its severity.
- There is no known cure for smallpox at this time.
- Medicine can help control fever and pain. Antibiotics will usually prevent bacterial infections.
- Patients are separated from others while receiving treatment to prevent the spread of smallpox. This is called **isolation**.
- Persons who have been exposed to smallpox but who are not yet ill may also be separated from others to prevent the spread of the disease. This is called **quarantine**.

Smallpox, continued

- In most cases, isolation and quarantine are voluntary. However, federal, state and local governments have authority to isolate and quarantine people to protect the public.

Vaccination

- Routine smallpox vaccination is not currently recommended for any non-military individual.
- Studies suggest that if the vaccine is given within 4 to 7 days of exposure to smallpox, it can decrease the severity of illness or possibly even prevent disease.
- Rhode Island has a supply of smallpox vaccine should an outbreak occur.



Chemical Attack

A chemical terrorist attack is the intentional release of a toxic gas, liquid or solid that can poison people and the environment.

Examples of chemical substances include:

- Sulfur mustard or mustard gas
- Nerve agents such as sarin, soman, strychnine, tabun, VX

How will I know there has been a chemical attack?

- Physical signs of a chemical terrorist attack may include powder (e.g. strychnine), aerosol spray (e.g. sarin), odorous gas (e.g. sulfur mustard) or liquid (e.g. tabun).
- Many sick or dead birds, fish or small animals may indicate a chemical attack.
- Symptoms of exposure to a chemical include watery eyes, twitching, choking, trouble breathing or loss of coordination.

What should I do in the event of a chemical attack?

- Leave the area immediately and find clean air.
- Do not pass through the contaminated area, if possible.
- If you are in a building and cannot get out, move as far away as possible from the contaminated area and stay where you are.
- Call 911 if you believe emergency officials have not yet been notified.

If you think you have been exposed to a chemical:

- Immediately take off your outer clothing, because chemicals can stick to your clothing. If possible, seal your clothing in a plastic bag. Seek assistance from emergency officials when disposing of the clothing.
- Find a hose, fountain, or any source of water and rinse off, with soap if possible.
- Seek emergency medical attention.

Chemical Substance Example: Sarin

What is sarin?

Sarin is a manufactured chemical nerve agent originally developed in 1938 as a pesticide. It is a clear, colorless and tasteless liquid that has no odor. Sarin can evaporate into a vapor (gas) and spread into the air.

How are people exposed to sarin?

- Through skin or eye contact, or by breathing air that contains sarin.
- By drinking or touching contaminated water, or by eating contaminated food.
- By touching clothing or other surfaces that have been exposed to sarin.
- People may not know that they were exposed because sarin has no odor.

Symptoms

- Exposure would result in immediate symptoms, such as runny nose, watery eyes and blurred vision, and changes in heart rate and blood pressure.
- Even a small drop of sarin on the skin can cause sweating and muscle twitching in that area.
- Exposure to large doses of sarin may result in loss of consciousness, convulsions, paralysis and respiratory failure, possibly leading to death.

Prevention and Treatment

- People exposed to sarin should take off outer clothing, rapidly wash thoroughly with soap and water, and get medical care as quickly as possible.
- Recovery from sarin exposure is possible if medical care is accessed rapidly.
- Treatment consists of removing sarin from the body as soon as possible and administering medications to counteract the symptoms.



Cranston (RI) HAZMAT team
conducting a training exercise.

Radiological Attack

A radiological terrorist attack is the use of common explosives or weapons to spread radioactive materials over a targeted area.

Examples of radiological attacks include:

- Dirty bombs
- Nuclear bombs
- Attacks on nuclear power plants

How will I know there has been a radiological attack?

- If a dirty bomb is used, you may feel and/or hear the blast. The resulting radioactive pollution would be limited to a small area around the site of the explosion.
- If a nuclear weapon is used, the explosion will damage buildings over a large area and spread radioactive pollution over a larger area.
- If a nuclear power plant in a neighboring state is attacked, the radiation may spread in the air toward Rhode Island. An accident or other emergency at a nuclear power plant could have the same result.
- Radiation is not visible to the human eye. Trained personnel with special equipment can detect whether radiation is present.

What should I do in the event of a radiological attack?

- Quickly determine whether you can get out of the area or if it would be better to go inside a building to limit your exposure to the radiation.
- If you are inside, close windows and doors. Turn off air conditioners, heaters and other ventilation systems.
- Take cover as far below ground as possible (e.g. in a basement), or get behind a thick wall or other barrier to shield yourself. Cover your nose and mouth with layers of cloth.
- Watch TV, listen to the radio, and check the Internet for official news as it becomes available.

If you think you have been exposed to radiation:

- Immediately take off outer clothing and wash yourself thoroughly. Radioactive materials can stick to your clothing and skin. If possible, seal your clothing in a plastic bag. Seek assistance from emergency officials when disposing of the clothing.

Radiological Weapon Example: Dirty Bomb

What is a dirty bomb?

A dirty bomb combines a conventional explosive, such as dynamite, with radioactive material that will be spread around the area where the bomb goes off. A dirty bomb is not the same as a nuclear weapon. Dirty bombs usually spread radioactive material over a limited area. With a dirty bomb, there is typically more danger from the explosion than from the radioactive material.

How are people exposed to radiation?

- Radiation is absorbed into the body from air that has been contaminated.
- Until doctors are able to check people's skin with sensitive radiation detection devices, it will not be clear whether they were exposed.

Symptoms

- Typically, exposure to radiation causes no immediate symptoms.
- Heavy exposure, although unlikely, can cause radiation sickness (nausea, vomiting and diarrhea), eye damage, genetic defects, some types of cancer and even death.

Prevention and Treatment

- Anyone who has been exposed should remove all clothing and wash their entire body. This will reduce total radiation exposure.
- There is no specific treatment for radiation exposure; those with extensive symptoms will be treated in a clean environment such as a hospital burn unit.
- Additional medical care will be required in rare cases where body organs, such as bone marrow or the gastrointestinal system are damaged.

COPING WITH EMERGENCIES

Physical and emotional reactions often occur as a result of a natural emergency or traumatic event such as a terrorist attack. These reactions may happen immediately or weeks or months after an event. Traumatic stress reactions can happen to people of any age and can change a person's behavior, thoughts and physical health.



The physical effects caused by a traumatic event may be similar to the physical effects resulting from acute anxiety, including:

- Rapid heartbeat,
- Increased respiratory rate,
- Shortness of breath,
- Nausea,
- Muscle and joint aches,
- Tremors, and
- Headaches.

Seek medical attention if any of these symptoms persist.

Thoughts, behaviors and emotions may also change as a result of a traumatic event. These changes may include:

- Flashbacks or re-experiencing the event as if it was happening again,
- Withdrawal from normal social relations,
- Performance problems at work or school,
- Loss or increase in appetite,
- Difficulty in sleeping or recurring nightmares,
- Feeling overwhelmed, hopeless, numb,
- Feeling agitated, irritable, short-tempered,
- Being extremely anxious, fearful,
- Feeling depressed, sad,
- Being confused, unable to make decisions, having difficulty concentrating,
- Being hyper-vigilant, easily startled, overly sensitive, and
- Increased consumption of alcohol or prescribed, over-the-counter or illicit drugs.



Here are some ideas about how to cope with the stress and anxiety caused by a traumatic event:

- Don't feel you are "crazy." Traumatic stress reactions are normal reactions to an extraordinary event.
- Eat balanced meals and get enough sleep.
- Exercise regularly.
- Avoid the use of alcohol, or over-the-counter or prescription drugs to relieve tension. It will only delay or complicate your recovery. Avoid caffeine, especially if you are having trouble sleeping.
- Don't make major life changes or decisions.
- Share your feelings with others. Talk with people you trust.
- Do things you enjoy.
- Maintain your usual routine, but give yourself some breaks.

Things to keep in mind:

- Traumatic stress reactions can happen to healthy, strong people. They are not signs of weakness.
- When explaining bad events to children, provide accurate information. Children often have misunderstandings or misinformation that you can correct. Teenagers often pretend that things do not bother them, so it is important to reach out to them.

For more information on coping with traumatic stress, visit the following websites:

The American Psychological Association -
Coping with Terrorism
www.helping.apa.org/daily/terrorism.html

National Institute of Mental Health –
Information About Coping with Traumatic Events
www.nimh.nih.gov/outline/traumatic.cfm

National Mental Health Association
www.nmha.org/reassurance/terrorism.cfm

Resources for Children:

The American Academy of Pediatrics –
Helping Children Cope with the Issue of Terrorism
www.aap.org/terrorism/index.html

Reactions and Guidelines for Children
Following/Coping With Disaster
<http://helping.apa.org/daily/ptguidelines.html>

If you do not have Internet access, you may use computers at your local library to visit these websites.

Other Resources:

American Psychological Association's
Referral Line.....800-964-2000

The National Mental Health Association.....800-969-6642

The National Mental Health
Awareness Campaign.....877-495-0009

The Office of Victims of Crime Hotline.....800-331-0075

The RI Department of Health does not endorse the content provided by these organizations.

Information in this booklet was adapted from the following sources. Please visit the following websites for more information.

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www.redcross.org/services/disaster/0,1082,0_604_,00.html (Accessed 7/12/04)

Boston Public Health Commission. 2002. “Live. Learn. Prepare. Information on dealing with disaster and about the new threats we face.”
www.bphc.org/bphc/pdfs/EPrep_Guide_Eng.pdf (Accessed 7/12/04)

United States Department of Health and Human Services—Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. www.cdc.gov (Accessed 7/12/04)

National Safety Council. www.nsc.org (Accessed 7/12/04)

United States Department of Homeland Security. www.ready.gov. (Accessed 7/12/04)

Federal Emergency Management Agency, American Red Cross. 1991. “Family Disaster Plan.” www.redcross.org/static/file_cont36_lang0_23.pdf (Accessed 7/12/04)

U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission. “Fact Sheet on Dirty Bombs.”
www.nrc.gov/reading-rm/doc-collections/fact-sheets/dirty-bombs.html (Accessed 7/12/04)

Other useful resources:

Rhode Island Department of Health: www.health.ri.gov

Rhode Island Emergency Management Agency:
www.riema.ri.gov

Rhode Island Department of Mental Health, Retardation & Hospitals: www.mhrh.state.ri.us

Rhode Island Red Cross: www.riredcross.org

Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management:
www.state.ri.us/dem

Family Emergency Planning Card

Use this card as a guide as you develop your family’s emergency plan and make a photocopy for each household member.

Family Emergency Contact Information

Contact information for each family member.

Work Number(s):

School Number(s):

Childcare Provider Number(s):

Cell Phone Number(s):

Out-of-State Emergency Contact Information

An out-of-state contact can help you stay in touch with other family members if you are separated during an emergency.

Name:

Phone Number 1:

Phone Number 2:

Emergency Meeting Place(s)

Choose one location outside your neighborhood and one outside Rhode Island.

Address 1:

Address 2: