

USACHPPM
DEPUTY CHIEF OF STAFF FOR OPERATIONS
HEALTH INFORMATION OPERATIONS
WEEKLY UPDATE

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RECENT ISSUES

1. INHALATIONAL ANTHRAX – WASHINGTON, D.C. AND FLORIDA. A second hospitalized postal worker in the Brentwood Facility was diagnosed with inhalational anthrax today. The first postal worker was admitted to a northern Virginia hospital on Friday, October 19. The deaths of two other postal workers at the Brentwood Facility are being investigated as possible anthrax exposures. Over 2,200 postal employees are being screened for anthrax exposure and placed on ciprofloxacin. On Monday, 15 October the Florida Department of Health announced Ernesto Blanco, an American Media Inc., mailroom employee, had now received a diagnosis of inhalational anthrax. Mr. Blanco was previously classified as being exposed to anthrax spores. The cumulative number of inhalational anthrax cases associated with bioterrorism is four.

2. CUTANEOUS ANTHRAX – NEW YORK, NEW JERSEY AND WASHINGTON, D.C. The cumulative number of cutaneous anthrax cases associated with bioterrorism in the US is five. The first case to develop symptoms was a seven-month old son of an ABC producer who developed a rash and was hospitalized on 28 September. On 1 October a NBC assistant to Tom Brokaw developed a low-grade fever and a rash on her face. On 18 October two more cases of cutaneous anthrax were identified in a CBS assistant to Dan Rather and a Trenton, New Jersey letter carrier. A second New Jersey postal worker in the Hamilton Township distribution center tested positive for cutaneous anthrax. Also, an assistant to the editorial page editor for the New York Post was diagnosed with cutaneous anthrax; an unopened letter, which tested positive for anthrax, was found in the mailroom. One case in a New Jersey postal worker remains under investigation.

3. ANTHRAX EXPOSURES – FLORIDA, NEW YORK, WASHINGTON, D.C., AND KENYA. One employee of the American Media, Inc. (AMI), offices was positive for exposure to anthrax spores. One police officer and two laboratory technicians, who were investigating the NBC incident, were positive for anthrax exposure. A letter sent to Senator Tom Daschle tested positive for anthrax and resulted up to 4,500 nasal swabs to assess exposure. Twenty-eight people, who worked on the fifth and sixth floors of the Hart building, were positive on preliminary testing and were placed on antibiotics. Also on Thursday, Nairobi's health minister reported a Kenya citizen received an envelope from Atlanta that tested positive for anthrax spores. The USPS is providing a post card to all American and military APO and FPO addresses that will detail how to assess a letter or package for harmful biologic agents. The following postcard should arrive next week: http://www.usps.gov/news/2001/press/pr01_1019postcard.htm

4. ANTHRAX RAPID TEST KIT. The Laboratories of Tetracore, Inc., have a rapid (15 minutes), hand-held, on-site screening test for biological agents available to emergency response

and law enforcement officials. The company currently has test strips for *Bacillus anthracis*, ricin toxin, botulinum toxin, and staphylococcal enterotoxin B. <http://www.alexeter.com/prod01.htm>
The CDC is not currently recommending use of these tests based on a lack of scientific information regarding sensitivity and specificity.

5. **HOMELAND SECURITY.** Mr. Tom Ridge announced on Friday that the anthrax strains found at AMI, NBC and Senator Daschle's office are indistinguishable. A reward for up to \$1 million is being offered for information leading to the arrest and conviction of those responsible for mailing anthrax. Mr. Ridge also vowed to prosecute individuals charged with anthrax hoaxes to the maximum extent of the law. In an average year, the FBI provides 250 assessments and responses to chemical and biological agents or other weapons of mass destruction. During October, the FBI has handled more than 3,300 of which 2,500 involve suspected anthrax threats. Four people were charged this week in connection with false anthrax threats, and efforts are underway with state and local officials to prosecute additional cases. Two individuals lied to federal authorities regarding knowledge of or involvement with a hoax and two others falsely threatened to use biological weapons of mass destructions.

6. **SMALLPOX VACCINATION GUIDANCE – WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION (WHO).** The WHO Smallpox Advisory Group began reviewing the Smallpox Vaccination Guidance this week in light of current bioterrorism concerns. The guidelines currently only recommend vaccination for laboratory and research personnel actively engaged in research with this disease. The review will determine if additional guidance is needed regarding vaccination after a deliberate exposure involving bioterrorism. The WHO uses the Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network to monitor disease outbreaks through 72 existing networks.

7. **SMALLPOX VACCINATION – MERCK.** Merck & Co. is in discussion with the Department of Health and Human Services regarding the possibility of helping to develop a smallpox vaccine.

8. **MALARIA – AFGHANISTAN.** Malaria was reported in Jalalabad in the Nangarhar Province (125 km East of Kabul) and in the Konddoz Province in northern Afghanistan (http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/middle_east_and_asia/afghanistan.jpg). *P. vivax* is the primary vector but *P. falciparum* is increasing. Historically, the highest incidence of malaria is in irrigated areas below 2,000 meters, which includes the northeast and southern regions of the country. Lower elevation areas of southern Afghanistan are currently experiencing high temperatures in the 80s where malaria could continue to be a threat into November. The optimum temperature range for mosquito vector and parasite development is 68-86 degrees Fahrenheit.

9. **COLD INJURY THREAT – AFGHANISTAN.** Falling temperatures and rain turning to snow was predicted over the weekend in the northeast mountainous regions of Afghanistan according to the Afghanistan Weather Forecast provided by AccuWeather.com. The website provides a high temperature map for the region as well as a streaming video forecast for Afghanistan: <http://www1.accuweather.com/iwxpage/adc/popup/wx2b/index.htm>.

10. **BIOEVENTS MAP.** Mitretek Systems has re-engineered BioEvents Maps, which is available for public use at <http://sonoran.mitretek.org/gismsr/bioevents/>. BioEvents Maps is a web-based GIS application that allows a standard web browser to display reported biological events by location on a map. The application uses ProMED as the information source, and currently provides biological events only in the United States. The current data set extends back to July 2001. Note that Internet Explorer seems to work better than Netscape.

11. **CRIMEAN CONGO HEMORRHAGIC FEVER (CCHF) – IRAN.** Various media reports of 63 to over 100 cases of CCHF were reported recently in Isfahan, Sistan va Baluchistan, Luristan, and West Azerbaijan Provinces. The disease is endemic in Iran and the Ministry of Health reported 37 cases (eight deaths) last year. Iran's Veterinary Organization believes the disease is associated with smuggled cattle, sheep and camels from Afghanistan. Approximately one to two million livestock are smuggled into Iran each year. The government has initiated insecticide spraying and has established 39 hospitals, 40 quarantine units on the border with Afghanistan and another 100 mobile quarantine units in an attempt to block the disease spread. The upcoming winter months usually serve to decrease CCHF activity.

12. **INFLUENZA SURVEILLANCE – NORTHERN HEMISPHERE.** The National Flu Surveillance Network (NFSN) classifies influenza activity in the United States. The state of New York remains in an alert status. Five states are now listed under an influenza watch: California, Florida, Indiana, Texas, and Wisconsin. <http://www.fluwatch.com/>

13. **DENGUE FEVER – HAWAII.** Confirmed, cumulative cases rose from 40 to 59 this week with 49 in Maui, six in Oahu, and four in Kauai. The Governor reports that none of these cases have required hospitalization. On Friday, October 19, the State Health Director emphasized that the last 11 cases were not new but were confirmed cases of previously identified and treated individuals. Two suspect cases and 262 reports of illness remain under investigation. The Hawaii Department of Health (DOH) has initiated dengue hotlines for each of the islands affected and the Big Island, which are listed in an educational brochure available for printing from the DOH website: <http://www.state.hi.us/doh/dengue/> in an effort to allay fears and misinformation regarding communicability of the disease. Patients are infective for mosquitoes from shortly before to the end of the febrile period, which is usually 3-5 days. Some individuals are asymptomatic; this occurs in children about 85 percent of the time. Environmental efforts are being emphasized as the wet season approaches.

14. **BOVINE SPONGIFORM ENCEPHALOPATHY (BSE)/POTENTIAL VARIANT CREUTZFELD-JAKOB DISEASE (vCJD) – JAPAN.** Japan's health ministry confirmed on Thursday that a teenage girl might have vCJD. Japan has tested over 3,800 cows thus far for BSE following Asia's first confirmed case of BSE on a dairy farm near Tokyo. A three-stage screening process will require national and local government authorities to test approximately 1.3 million cows. A health ministry panel recommended adding restrictions on blood donations from individuals living six months or longer in Belgium, Netherlands, and Italy to the existing list of restricted countries involving BSE exposure (Britain, France, Germany, Ireland, Portugal, Spain or Switzerland).

15. **BSE – UNITED KINGDOM.** A four-year study to determine if sheep could/have contracted BSE was abandoned this week after contamination of laboratory specimens was discovered. The Veterinary Laboratory Association admitted that ovine specimens provided to scientists were contaminated with bovine samples. The specimens were originally collected in 1990 and held in the laboratory according to the Government’s Chief Veterinary Officer.

16. **RIFT VALLEY FEVER – SAUDI ARABIA AND YEMEN.** The cumulative number of deaths is 77 in an outbreak of Rift Valley Fever that began last month. Last year more than 200 people died in Saudi Arabia and Yemen.

17. **COCCIDIOIDOMYCOSIS – BAKERSFIELD, CALIFORNIA.** Governor Davis appropriated \$500,000 to the California Department of Health to continue research for a vaccine for Valley Fever. The Governor preserved this funding amidst considerable budget cuts based on the “vital and immediate public health issue in the Central Valley.” Kern County is reporting a higher than average number of coccidioidomycosis cases for the year compared to last year (338 versus 257).

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