

Policy Statement

Bioterrorism: The Role of Clinical Laboratories and the Workforce

(Policy Number 04-02)

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ASCP calls on the federal government to work cooperatively with our nation's clinical laboratories to ensure that they are up-to-date and fully prepared for all possible emergencies related to bioterrorism.

Background and Rationale

The public health challenges facing modern health care have changed in profound and disturbing ways. Bioterrorism is now a real and significant concern and our nation's clinical laboratories need to be better prepared to address this threat. As members of the vast national team of first responders, laboratory practitioners are on the front lines of our nation's effort to confront a bioterror attack and perform life-saving work. For reasons of national security, ASCP calls on the federal government to recognize and enhance the role the clinical laboratory will exercise in the event of a bioterror attack.

ASCP has developed five strategic recommendations to better prepare clinical laboratories in the event of a bioterror attack:

1. Strengthen communication lines between clinical laboratories and governmental laboratories at the federal and state level.
2. Support continuing education and the training necessary for the laboratory workforce to become current and fully prepared for a bioterror attack.
3. Develop strategies for enabling the laboratory workforce to meet current and future educational needs related to preparation for a biological or chemical attack.
4. Develop safety guidelines with clinical laboratories that specifically address procedures for how to operate when a bioterror attack occurs.
5. Enhance clinical laboratory preparedness to conduct bioterrorism related testing (e.g., rule-out possible bioterror agents) and optimize clinical laboratories ability to participate in the public health system by serving in a surge capacity role as needed.

The Centers for Disease Prevention and Control (CDC) created the Laboratory Response Network (LRN) in 1999 to address the need for an integrated national and international network of laboratories ready to address the threat of bioterrorism.¹ This network includes federal, state and local public health laboratories and agencies, as well as veterinary, military, food testing, environmental and international laboratories, and has been specifically designed to quickly respond to possible acts of chemical or biological terrorism, emerging infectious disease and other public health threats and emergencies.² Additionally, the CDC identified continuing education related to bioterrorism as important to enhancing laboratory testing practices and quality, as well as to improve overall laboratory preparedness in case of attack.³

Since the September 11, 2001 tragedy and the anthrax attacks that occurred in the fall of 2001, the federal government has taken a more active role in encouraging research, development and preparedness for bioterror attacks. Since 2001, the federal government has allocated approximately \$2 billion⁴ to state and local governments and hospitals to enhance the nation's public health infrastructure to better prepare for further terror attacks on the United States.

Our nation's public health system must be prepared to manage a large-scale emergency. Our nation's clinical laboratories must also be prepared for the role they would play in such an emergency. ASCP supports the continued enhancement of the nation's public health infrastructure and in particular the Laboratory Response Network. ASCP calls on federal and state governments to improve communication and enhance the role of our nation's clinical laboratories as well as our workforce.

References

¹ [Facts About the Laboratory Response Network](#). Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Department of Health and Human Services. (2004, February 4). Accessed on 9/26/2017.

² CDC Laboratory Preparedness for Emergencies Fact Sheet; Department of Health and Human Services Center for Disease Control and Prevention, February 4, 2004.

³ [The Public Health Response to Biological and Chemical Terrorism: Interim Planning Guide for State Public Health Officials](#). Department of Health and Human Services. (2001, July). Accessed on 09/26/2017.

⁴ Hearne, Shelley A., Davis, Matthew, Segal, Laura M., Unruh, Patti, and earls, Michael. (2003) Ready or Not? Protecting the Public's Health on the Age of Bioterrorism. Trust for America's Health.