

BIOTERRORISM:
PLAGUE

SOUTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONTROL

TACTICS AGAINST TERRORISM: **PLAGUE**

South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control
Office of Public Health Preparedness



What is bioterrorism?

Bioterrorism is the intentional use of bacteria, viruses, or natural toxins (poisons) as a weapon to kill, injure or produce disease in humans, animals or plants. Terrorists may use such an attack to create fear, disrupt the economy, or to get a response from the government.

What is plague?

Plague is a disease caused by bacteria carried by rats, mice, squirrels, prairie dogs and fleas. In North America, plague occurs in small animals and fleas in the western states of California, Nevada, New Mexico and Arizona.

Plague bacteria do not exist naturally in South Carolina. Therefore, a case of plague in this state would be suspicious and the potential of bioterrorism would have to be considered.

The bacteria can remain alive for several weeks in water or moist soil. Plague could also survive for some time in dry saliva, flea droppings and buried bodies. Heat kills plague bacteria.

Types of plague

Bubonic plague is the most common type of plague. You can get bubonic plague if a flea carrying the bacteria bites you. You can also get it if you touch an infected animal and the bacteria get into a cut or wound. Bubonic plague forms hard knots, known as “buboes,” in certain areas of your body. If bubonic plague isn’t treated, it can spread to your internal organs and become much more serious.

Septicemic plague is spread the same way as bubonic plague. However, this form of plague can spread through the body’s central nervous system and lungs.

Pneumonic plague is caused by breathing in plague bacteria. It is the most serious type of plague and can cause death.

The interest in the terrorist potential of plague was brought to light in 1995 when Larry Wayne Harris was arrested in Ohio for the illicit procurement of (plague) through the mail. The contagious nature of pneumonic plague makes it particularly concerning as a biological weapon. - *USAMRIID Blue Book Sixth Edition*

How people get plague

You can’t get bubonic and septicemic plague from other people. It does not spread from person to person. However, you can get pneumonic plague from another person. It can be spread by coughing or sneezing. Becoming infected in this way requires close contact with the infected person.

If plague bacteria were released over a city with 5 million people, 150,000 people could get pneumonic plague and about 36,000 people could die from it.

– World Health Organization

How plague can be used for terrorism

Plague bacteria can be found in nature. Plague also can be grown in a laboratory. Terrorists can grow plague and use it as a weapon to strike many people at one time by putting the bacteria in the air. Since plague might not produce symptoms for several days, an infected person could travel great distances and expose many more people before seeking a doctor's help.

Symptoms of plague

- Fever
- Chills
- Headache
- Extreme weakness
- Pneumonia
- Shortness of breath
- Chest pain
- Coughing up blood
- Nausea and other stomach sickness
- Vomiting
- Stomach pain
- Swollen areas around the neck, ears and inner thigh
(only with bubonic plague)

If you have plague, you can develop symptoms as early as one day and as late as six days after being exposed.

Treating plague

Without medical care, bubonic plague can spread to the lungs and cause pneumonic plague. If you do not see a doctor, the plague can result in death. If you think you have plague, see a doctor right away. You should not be around other people. You might infect someone else. Your doctor will give you a prescription for medicine. It is important to take it within 24 hours of the first symptoms. You must take it for at least seven days.

How to protect yourself and others

If plague is identified in South Carolina, there are steps you can take to help protect yourself and your family.

- Get rid of places in and around your home where small animals like rats, mice and squirrels might live.
- Don't leave out food that small animals might eat.
- Avoid touching sick or dead animals. Instead, call the local public health department or law enforcement officials.
- Put insect repellent on your skin and clothes to stop fleas from biting.
- Treat pet dogs and cats for fleas.
- See a doctor right away if you think you have been infected with plague bacteria.

What's being done to protect you

- The South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) keep constant watch for cases of plague. Doctors and hospitals are required by law to report any cases of plague to their local public health department immediately. Every case of plague is treated as an emergency because many people can get sick. If someone might be sick from the plague, DHEC and the CDC will take steps to help prevent others from getting sick.
- The CDC has a supply of antibiotics to treat plague. If large amounts of medicine are needed to treat plague in South Carolina, this stockpile can be shipped here very quickly.
- Your doctor can talk to experts at DHEC and the CDC about plague 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

If there is a terrorist attack using plague, local and state law enforcement and health agencies will provide additional information to help you protect yourself.

Numbers to know

Emergencies:	9-1-1
DHEC (during normal business hours):	(803) 898-3432
CDC:	(800) 232-4636

For more information

S.C. DHEC

<http://www.scdhec.gov>

DHEC Office of Public Health Preparedness

<http://www.scdhec.gov/administration/ophp/tactics.htm>

DHEC and plague

<http://www.scdhec.gov/health/disease/han/plague.htm>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

<http://www.bt.cdc.gov>

World Health Organization

<http://www.who.int>

The phone numbers for reporting cases or possible cases of bioterrorism to your local health department and the DHEC Division of Acute Disease Epidemiology are available at: http://www.scdhec.gov/health/disease/docs/reportable_conditions.pdf

This publication provides health information for your general knowledge. Talk to your doctor about your concerns about any medical condition. DHEC does not recommend you diagnose or treat yourself for a serious illness.









South Carolina Department of Health
and Environmental Control

SOUTH CAROLINA

A map of South Carolina with the text 'Tactics Against Terrorism' overlaid on it. The text is in a bold, sans-serif font, with 'Tactics' on the top line, 'Against' on the middle line, and 'Terrorism' on the bottom line.

**Tactics
Against
Terrorism**

Be Safe. Be Smart.