

Medscape General Medicine (MedGenMed) Publishes Study on Impact of Anthrax Attacks on American Public

Anthrax Incidents Created Anxieties Nationwide

National, Local Systems of Intelligence Collection about Public's Response to Bioterrorist Attacks Needed

New York, NY (April 17, 2002) --A new study about the public's response to the anthrax incidents suggests that the lives of a large share of Americans were affected by the anthrax attacks and these individuals expressed a higher sense of concern about exposure and took more precautions in handling their mail, according to research published today in Medscape General Medicine (*MedGenMed*), the first and only online, peer-reviewed, primary source general medical journal at www.medgenmed.com. In addition, the study concludes that a system of intelligence collection about the public's response to bioterrorist attacks is needed at a national and local level. MedGenMed is published by the leading professional medical information site, www.medscape.com, and is owned and operated by WebMD Corporation (NASDAQ: HLTH).

The study, "The Impact on Anthrax Attacks on the American Public," authored by researchers from the Harvard School of Public Health, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and ICR/International Communications Research, surveyed more than 2,500 American adults in November/December 2001 and was designed to examine the public's response to the anthrax incidents nationally and in the three metropolitan areas where the cases were reported (Washington, DC, Trenton/Princeton, NJ and Boca Raton, FL).

According to the study, nearly one in four Americans were very or somewhat worried that they could contract anthrax from opening their mail at home or at work. One in three Americans reported that they were taking precautions when opening the mail. 25% of Americans reported that they or someone in their household had maintained emergency supplies because of bioterrorism reports. In addition, 1 in every 10 adults nationwide reported that they or someone in their household had consulted a physician because of the reports of bioterrorism and the same number of Americans consulted a website for information on how to protect themselves. About three-fourths (78%) of Americans were very or somewhat confident that their own doctor could recognize the symptoms of anthrax.

"With the ongoing threat of additional bioterrorist attacks in the United States, this research is particularly relevant since it reveals an underlying anxiety about the attacks, suggesting that subsequent incidents could place considerable short-term demand on the U.S. healthcare system," wrote the authors. "If such incidents increase in number and reach, Americans are likely to rely heavily on their own physicians for advice, suggesting that there needs to be high priority given to educating physicians about the symptoms of anthrax and the appropriateness of taking vaccines against these diseases."

The authors continued: "Since national surveys of the public are unlikely to reflect the concerns and behaviors of people in areas affected by the attacks, the results of this study also suggest that that national and local systems of intelligence collection about the public's response to bioterrorist attacks are needed."

Following are some of the other key findings:

- About 1 in 5 residents of the Washington, DC (21%) and Trenton/Princeton, NJ (19%) areas reported that they, a friend, or a family member had been exposed to or tested for anthrax, or had their workplace closed due to known or suspected anthrax contamination or disease.

- At the time of the survey, more than half (54%) of Trenton/Princeton-area residents were taking precautions when opening their mail-including washing their hands after opening mail, wearing gloves, or completely avoiding opening their mail-as a result of recent incidents of anthrax in the mail. This was a significantly higher proportion than among either Washington or Boca Raton-area residents (37% each).
- More than three-fourths (83%-89%) of affected-area residents believed that if they received immediate medical care, they would be very or somewhat likely to survive after contracting the skin form of anthrax. Smaller majorities (62%-68%) believed they would survive inhalation anthrax

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The data reported in the article are derived from a study by the Harvard School of Public Health/Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Survey Project on Americans' Response to Biological Terrorism.

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