

Getting Informed*

NOVA Activity **Bioterror**

Although some students have heard about bioterrorism, particularly the anthrax bacterium, the idea of a biological attack may seem unreal to them. The unexpected nature of the anthrax attacks, as well as the fact that most students and adults had not heard about the disease prior to fall 2001, may cause students to react differently to the news. Providing facts about anthrax and other agents may help alleviate some fears. Be conscious of providing age-appropriate answers to your students when discussing these issues.

What Are Bioagents?



Bioagents are biological agents that can be used for biowarfare. Anthrax is considered one of the most likely bioagents to be used by bioterrorists. Students likely will have heard many different facts about anthrax and may have formed misconceptions about the disease. To explore students' understanding, have each student write down three facts they know and three questions about the disease and hand them into you. (Tell students they do not need to identify themselves.) Discuss students' facts and questions, clarifying as needed. (See *Activity Answer* on page 15 for more information.) Repeat the exercise with other bioagents students may have heard of, such as smallpox, plague, botulism, tularemia, and Ebola virus.

Who Says What



Have students investigate media reports about 21st century bioterrorism. Before they watch the NOVA program, organize students into five groups to take notes on 1) bioweapons development in the former Soviet Union, 2) bioweapons development in the United States, 3) obstacles to developing bioweapons, 4) obstacles to delivering bioweapons, and 5) facts about anthrax and smallpox.

After watching, have groups report on each category. Provide the same groups with five other recent media sources and have them research how each covered the five categories and report their findings to the class. How do the reports compare? Which sources gave the most facts? Which sources gave the least? What might account for any factual differences? What emotional tone, if any, did the reports convey?

***Sources:** Centers for Disease Control

What's Being Done?



All levels of government are responding to the bioterrorist attacks. To help students understand the role of various groups and agencies, have them investigate and report on actions being taken at the local, state, and federal level. Some resources for this information include:

Linguistic/Behavioral Analysis of Anthrax Letters

www.fbi.gov/majcases/anthrax/amerithrax.htm

Includes information about the analysis of the anthrax-laced letters mailed to television anchor Tom Brokaw, the New York Post, and Senator Tom Daschle.

Office of Homeland Security

www.whitehouse.gov/homeland/

Details current efforts by the Office of Homeland Security.

StatePublicHealth.org

www.statepublichealth.org/index.php

Lists directories of state health agencies and contact information for current state health officials.

State and Local Efforts and Key Contacts

www.bt.cdc.gov/STAndLocal/

Provides information about specific state and local project efforts associated with bioterrorism preparedness and response and includes information on emergency contacts.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

www.hhs.gov/hottopics/healing/biological.html

Includes links to what agencies such as the Centers for Disease Control and the Food and Drug Administration are doing to counter bioterrorism.



Whom to Contact

The National Association of School Psychologists provides information for parents, educators, mental health professionals, and others as they cope with the unsettling current events. Visit NASP's Web site for more information at:

www.nasponline.org/NEAT/crisis_0911.html

or contact:

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