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QUESTIONS & ANSWERS ABOUT BIOTERRORISM

Q. What is Bioterrorism?

A. Bioterrorism is the intentional use of infectious biological agents, or germs, to cause illness.

Q. Is our water supply safe from bioterrorism?

A. Most bioterrorism experts agree that reservoirs are an unlikely target for bioterrorists. Methods already in place to filter and clean the drinking water supply are considered effective against most biological agents. Chlorine, for example, protects drinking water from other water-borne bacteria and would significantly dilute a biological agent, limiting its potential to do harm. Security measures have been increased.

Q. Where should residents of Stamford access information?

A. The Stamford Health Department, along with other government agencies, community partners, and healthcare facilities will do everything possible to protect the public health. If an emergency event occurs, the public would be provided with information through different channels: news media (radio stations, television stations and newspaper), the City of Stamford website, telephone (Dial Stamford, Citizens Services Center) and distribution of information at public buildings, such as the City libraries.

Q. Should Stamford residents stockpile antibiotics to protect themselves against bioterrorism?

A. The Stamford Health Department strongly recommends against stockpiling antibiotics. Inappropriate use of antibiotics may cause the development of antibiotic-resistant strains of common bacterial diseases. The CDC has developed a large Strategic National Stockpile of pharmaceuticals, including antibiotics that are effective against the most likely bacterial agents.

Q. Should I purchase a gas mask for my family?

A. The Stamford Health Department does not recommend the use of gas masks, which are not designed to provide protection against biologic agents. Gas masks would only protect against chemical agents if worn at the time of release, which means one would have to carry a gas mask at all times. Also, a gas mask needs to be fitted properly; improper use can cause serious injury, or even death.

Q. Should I take precautions when opening suspicious mail or packages?

A. Use common sense. If you receive a suspicious package or letter from someone you don't know, don't open it. Call local law enforcement if you have a concern about a package.

Suspicious packages and letters could include the following:

- Excessive postage
- Handwritten or poorly typed addresses
- Incorrect titles
- Title, but no name
- Misspellings of common words
- Oily stains, discolorations or odor
- No return address
- Excessive weight
- Lopsided or uneven envelope
- Protruding wires or aluminum foil
- Excessive security material such as masking tape, string, etc.
- Visual distractions
- Ticking sound
- Marked with restrictive endorsements, such as "Personal" or "Confidential"
- Shows a city or state in the postmark that does not match the return address

Q. Is there anything that Stamford residents can do to prepare for a possible attack?

A. The best way for residents to be safe is to be prepared before any disaster strikes. **The following is a summary of some suggestions from the American Red Cross:**

- Decide on a meeting place, away from your home or place of work, in the event you are evacuated. Make sure all members of your household know about the meeting place.
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- Local telephone service may be overburden during a crisis so it is important to identify someone out of town, located far away to contact in case of an emergency. Make sure household members have the telephone and email address of that person to check in with.
- If you have children, know their school's emergency plan in case the telephone system is not working. Make sure contact information is up to date with the school.
- Keep a household emergency kit so that essential items are available during an emergency. Residents should plan to have necessities (food, water, medication, etc.) for themselves and their families for a 3 to 4 day period, in the event that they have to remain inside their home for their safety.

For a comprehensive list of items you may need, please access the American Red Cross document, [Family Disaster Planning](http://www.redcross.org/services/disaster/beprepared/familyplan.html) at <http://www.redcross.org/services/disaster/beprepared/familyplan.html>, or call the American Red Cross, Stamford Office at (203)363-1041.

For additional information on bioterrorism, and emergency preparedness please access the following websites:

Stamford Department of Health: <http://cityofstamford.org/HealthDepartmentPublicHealth/>

Connecticut Department of Public Health: www.state.ct.us/dph

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: www.bt.cdc.gov