

AHRQ Unveils Hospital Bioterrorism Preparedness Tool

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The Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) today announced a new needs survey ([PDF file](#), 135 KB; [Text Version](#)) that hospitals can download and use as a checklist for assessing their capacity to handle potential victims of bioterrorist attacks or for evaluating existing emergency plans.

"Hospitals are on the front line for any bioterrorism attack. This tool will help hospitals plan to meet and anticipate needs imposed by a biological incident," said AHRQ's acting director, Carolyn M. Clancy, M.D.

The 42 questions in AHRQ's Bioterrorism Emergency Planning and Preparedness Questionnaire for Healthcare Facilities cover subjects such as biological weapons training for their personnel, procedures to permit rapid recognition of credentialed staff from other facilities, on-call nursing policies, and designated areas of emergency overflow for patients. The survey also asks hospitals about matters such as their supply of selected antibiotics and the diagnostic capability of their in-hospital laboratory.

The survey was developed as part of AHRQ's \$5 million bioterrorism initiative launched in 2000 to examine the needs for health system preparedness and capacity for bioterrorist attacks. The main purpose of the project was to develop and pilot test tools that will help hospitals and public health systems assess their ability to respond effectively to a bioterrorist attack.

The survey is the second online tool provided by the agency to help medical practitioners prepare for bioterrorism events. AHRQ also sponsors a Web site (<http://www.bioterrorism.uab.edu>) at the University of Alabama's Center for Disaster Preparedness that offers free, online continuing education courses for hospital-based physicians, nurses, radiologists and other medical personnel on topics such as the identification of potential bioterrorist agents and commonly associated syndromes, including smallpox and anthrax.

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