

Fact Sheet



Preparing for Biological, Chemical, Radiological or Other Threats

A **biological threat** can be the deliberate or accidental release of germs or other biological substances that can make you sick. These agents can be inhaled, passed through a cut in the skin or be eaten to make you sick. Some biological agents, such as anthrax, are not contagious. Others, like the smallpox virus, are diseases you can catch from other people.

A **chemical threat** can be a deliberate or accidental release of a toxic gas, liquid or solid that can poison you and the environment. Chemical agents can be released deliberately by bombs or sprayed from aircraft, boats or vehicles. Hazardous chemical spills can also be accidental, such as the spilling of household products like bleach or a release of hazardous waste. Chemical hazards can have an immediate effect or can take hours, or even days, before they are dangerous.

A **radiological threat** can include an emergency at a nuclear power plant, the use of a small nuclear weapon or a “dirty bomb” explosion. A dirty bomb contains an explosive that would scatter radioactive material over a targeted area, which is known as “fallout.”

In the event of a radiological incident, think about shielding, distance and time. If you live within a 10-mile radius of a radiological event, you should be aware of the evacuation routes established for their area.

- ✓ **Shielding:** If you have a thick shield between yourself and the radioactive materials, more of the radiation will be absorbed by it, and you will be exposed to less.
- ✓ **Distance:** The farther away you are from the blast and the fallout, the lower your exposure.
- ✓ **Time:** Minimizing time spent exposed also will reduce your risk. You should watch TV, listen to the radio, or check the Internet for official news following the event to determine:
 - The level of danger
 - What health effects may exist
 - Where to get medications or vaccines, if necessary
 - Where to go for medical help or shelter

Other Terrorist Threats

Other terrorist threats may include explosions, snipers, Internet viruses, etc. Visit: www.pema.state.pa.us, www.homelandsecurity.state.pa.us, www.bt.cdc.gov, www.ready.gov or www.health.state.pa.us for more information.

If you suspect terrorist activity, please contact the State Police Terrorism Tipline at 1-888-292-1919 or e-mail: sp-intelligence@state.pa.us.

Watch and Listen

As with any emergency, local authorities and public health officials may not immediately be able to provide information on what you should do. It may take time to determine exactly what the illness is, how it should be treated, and who is in danger. However, you should watch TV, listen to a NOAA weather radio or check the Internet often for official news and information as it becomes available. In the Commonwealth, we use the Emergency Alert System (EAS) during emergencies. When the decision is made to activate the EAS, original programming will be interrupted and an emergency message will be broadcast. It is important that you listen to these instructions.

- ✓ If you need to get out of the surrounding area or are directed to evacuate, do so immediately and take your emergency kit. Travel on routes specified by local authorities.
- ✓ If you are instructed to stay inside and not to evacuate (Shelter-in-Place):
 - Close and lock windows and doors;
 - Turn off ventilation systems, water and gas; and
 - Seal gaps under doorways and windows with duct tape.
- ✓ Stay inside until authorities say it is safe.
- ✓ If you suspect chemical or biological agents have entered your house, move to a safe room in the interior of the house on a higher floor if possible. Many harmful agents that could enter a house will fall and accumulate at lower levels.
- ✓ If harmful vapors do enter the house, covering your nose and mouth with a cloth can provide minimal breathing protection.

Homeland Security Advisory

The Homeland Security Advisory System is designed as a simple way to communicate information regarding the risk of terrorist activity. It provides warnings through a set of color-coded “Threat Conditions” that change to reflect current risk. There are five alert stages that range from green for low risk to red for severe risk. A specific color-coded threat condition may be assigned for the entire nation or may be different for areas of the country. Threat conditions also may be different for certain industries such as power plants, airports, transportation centers, or chemical factories. You can always find the most up-to-date information on threat conditions on the Pennsylvania Homeland Security website located at: www.homelandsecurity.state.pa.us.

The Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency's (PEMA) Office of Homeland Security, will coordinate any actions by government, businesses and volunteer organizations in response to changes in threat conditions. In addition, PEMA will notify appropriate state agencies and organizations such as the nine Regional Counter Terrorism Task Forces, County Emergency Management Coordinators and the County 911 Communications Centers of changes in the threat levels. Below are examples of actions the state will take at each threat level and steps you need to take to better protect yourself, your family, and your home:

- ✓ Red— The state may restrict transportation and access to critical locations. You must adhere to the restrictions announced by authorities and prepare to evacuate, if instructed. Stay alert for emergency messages.
- ✓ Orange— The state may activate Emergency Operations Centers and begin to restrict access to some critical locations. You should review your emergency communications plan with your family and monitor the news for further information and instructions.
- ✓ Yellow — The state will increase surveillance at critical locations such as power plants, bridges and tunnels. You should develop alternative routes for travel between work, home and school. Be prepared to assist and/or offer assistance to those with special needs and people who are older.
- ✓ Blue— The state will put key emergency response personnel on stand-by and provide information to the public as needed. You should be alert for and report any suspicious activity to the proper authorities. Review your emergency kit and replace outdated items.
- ✓ Green— The state will continue to develop and refine emergency response plans and conduct training exercises. You should develop an emergency communications plan and stock a home emergency kit and a “to go” kit for your vehicle.

For more information, visit: www.readypa.org

Additional resources: www.pema.state.pa.us, www.homelandsecurity.state.pa.us,
www.ready.gov or www.health.state.pa.us