

ASK AHSC

ANSWERS TO HEALTH QUESTIONS

From The University of Arizona Health Sciences Center (AHSC) in Tucson

Q How can I handle worrying about the threat of bioterrorism, the state of our economy, plus the usual holiday stress?

A It's important to acknowledge your anxiety and fears — especially about terrorism — in order to deal with them in a healthy manner. The terrorist attacks, the war in Afghanistan and the turbulent economy, have made each of us angry and that shouldn't be denied.

Realize that you can make choices. Choose to look at things from a different angle and to live each day more fully.

Take care of your physical, mental and spiritual health, not in a selfish way, so you'll be able to care for others.

Be aware of your body as a gift that can be used in reducing stress through walks in the park, exercising and good nutrition. Comfort foods are wonderful, as long as you don't go over the top with them!

Because recent events were so unexpected and brought terror, we can help control our mind by being alert to our surroundings. Noticing where you usually go and who's with you can even make your life more exciting.

Keep a journal or try new avenues of expression. Be in touch with your spiritual side.

Stay in touch with family and friends. Talk with them on the

telephone, email them. Reach out to others with love and concern.

Use strategies that have worked well in the past in dealing with stress. Avoid behaviors and activities that are destructive, such as excessive alcohol and drug use.

And take comfort in knowing everyone is in this together.

—JoAnn "Jody" Glittenberg, PhD, RN, professor, nursing; professor, anthropology; research professor, psychiatry, the University of Arizona Health Sciences Center, Tucson



Q What are the risks of bioterrorism for Arizonans?

A Arizona may be distant from the sites on the East Coast that have experienced bioterrorist incidents and therefore we might assume that bioterrorism preparedness is not an issue for Arizona.

We must recognize, however, that our state is connected to all parts of the globe by transportation corridors and mail systems. Further, the international border and several sensitive military installations in Arizona do pose potential terrorist risks for Arizona.

The very nature of bioterrorism is that it is unpredictable. While anthrax has been used by bioterrorists, we should not assume that anthrax will be used again, and unfortunately we need to be prepared for other possible disease threats. Obviously, we cannot predict if Arizona will be a target, but recent events prompt us to develop and implement a preparedness plan.

Preparedness for a bioterrorism event involves many sectors of the community — including health care, public health, and law enforcement — in coordinating an effective response. Plans are needed for vaccination programs, chemoprophylactic programs [the use of chemical agents, drugs, or food supplements to prevent disease], and potentially even the isolation of infected individuals, if for example there were a smallpox introduction.

Arizona has received federal funds during the past several years to support development of preparedness plans. The Arizona Department of Health Services has done an admirable job in coordinating this effort, making certain of our state's ability to effectively network health care facilities and public health departments.

The key elements of preparedness are educating health care providers and assuring that disease surveillance and reporting is excellent. Early recognition of a disease introduction is the key to our preparedness planning.

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Public health officials have rated smallpox as the most formidable terrorist threat that the United States could face. Although it was eradicated globally 25 years ago, samples of the virus remain frozen in several laboratories around the world.

Smallpox is highly contagious, and approximately 30 percent of people who are infected with smallpox will die. This is the reason that the United States government has placed such a

high priority on producing new supplies of smallpox vaccine, since vaccination would be the most effective way to prevent or limit a smallpox introduction by terrorists.

While the recent spate of anthrax infections raised public concern about bioterrorism, public health experts do not recommend that individuals stockpile Cipro or other antibiotics. Every drug carries a risk of side effects and self-medication with antibiotics when there is no evidence of a

problem within a thousand miles would expose individuals to health risks without clear benefit.

—Carlos C. “Kent” Campbell, MD, MPH, former official with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, now director, Arizona Health Education Centers Program and professor, public health, at the University of Arizona Health Sciences Center, Tucson