

## Section 4

# The Threat of Terrorism

Terrorism is a broad term that describes the use of force or violence against persons or property in violation of the criminal laws of the United States for purposes of intimidation, coercion, or ransom. Terrorist threats can come from many sources and take many forms. Recent attention has focused on terrorist use of weapons of mass destruction (WMD). These include toxic or poisonous chemicals, infectious disease organisms, radioactive materials, explosive incendiary or poison gas bombs, grenades, rockets or missiles, and mines or similar devices. During the initial assessment of any mass casualty situation, emergency responders must evaluate the possibility that it could be the result of a terrorist act.

Terrorists often use threats to create fear among the public – to try to convince citizens that their government is powerless to prevent terrorism, and to get immediate publicity for their causes. This could include threats of mass destruction or more traditional kidnappings and airplane hijackings where hostages are held in exchange for money or some other demand. To address the rising threat of terrorism in this country, the federal government established the [Homeland Security Advisory System](#) involving five threat conditions for possible terrorist attack:

**Green** = Low      **Blue** = Guarded      **Yellow** = Elevated      **Orange** = High      **Red** = Severe

While general explanations describe preparedness activities for each threat level, these were intended mainly for government agencies. Confusion persists about how to apply these guidelines to everyday life: What is the meaning of “condition yellow” to private citizens and their daily lives? Recognizing the need for more clarification of the federal advisory system, the [American Red Cross](#) developed a complementary set of guidelines for:

- [Individuals](#)
- [Families](#)
- [Neighborhoods](#)
- [Schools](#)
- [Businesses](#)

In recent years, public awareness of the threat of terrorism in the United States has grown dramatically. Government response plans have focused on developing resources in local, state, and federal government agencies including health departments, emergency responders (eg, police and fire departments, hazardous materials [hazmat] units, and emergency medical systems), and federal and military response units. Education and training efforts also have been directed to better prepare the civilian medical community.

The impact of terrorism can vary considerably from injuries and loss of life, to property damage and disruptions in services such as electricity, water supply, public transportation, and communications. Long-term consequences involve costly environmental clean-up and prolonged public anxiety. In all forms of terrorism, whether involving biological weapons, toxic chemicals, or conventional explosives, local physicians will provide acute and follow-up care to the victims. Medical responders likely will need to function unassisted until outside resources arrive, possibly 6 to 8 hours after the onset. Hospitals and clinics will be flooded with affected patients and the "worried well." To prepare for such events, it is has become evident that:

- Community responses to disasters, including terrorism, require physician participation;
- For some disasters, including biological terrorism and other infectious disease outbreaks, the public health response cannot begin unless clinicians report unusual disease cases; and
- Physicians will be more effective in their community response if they are prepared with appropriate education and training.

A critical component in dealing with terrorism and other disasters is a strong public health infrastructure. Investment in public health systems will enhance capacity to detect and contain rare or unusual disease outbreaks, whether deliberately induced or naturally occurring. Establishing more effective strategies against bioterrorism, for example, will have the benefit of improving response to natural epidemics and new or emerging diseases. Capacities needed to cope effectively with the consequences of an act of bioterrorism could therefore build on the systems used to respond to natural disease outbreaks. This allows for a dual-use response infrastructure that improves the capacity of physicians and public health agencies to respond to multiple hazards while taking into account the unique and complex challenges presented by terrorism. For more information on how to prepare for and respond to a terrorist attack, please refer to the following links and other sections of this *Resource Guide*:

### **American Red Cross**

#### [Terrorism – Preparing for the Unexpected](#)

Practical things individuals can do to prepare for an unexpected emergency and reduce the stress that typically follows. By taking preparatory action, one can exert a measure of control in helping to cope with such events.

### **American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP)**

#### [Terrorism Preparedness Office Flyer](#)

Office flyer containing key Web addresses for information about terrorism that physicians can post in their waiting rooms

### **American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP)**

#### [Children, Terrorism & Disasters](#)

Information on this site seeks to ensure: (1) that pediatricians and other pediatric providers have the information they need about terrorism and disasters as fast as it becomes available; (2) that children's needs are considered in all terrorism and disaster planning and response efforts; and (3) functioning linkages with all national, state and local governmental and private entities working on issues concerning terrorism and disasters.

**American College of Preventive Medicine (ACPM)**[Physician Preparedness for Acts of Water Terrorism Guide](#)

An on-line CME program sponsored by the ACPM for practicing healthcare professionals, who will most likely be the first to observe unusual illness patterns and must understand their critical role as "front-line responders" in detecting water-related disease resulting from biological, chemical or radiological terrorism. The primary purpose of the guide is to address this critical need and provide healthcare professionals with streamlined access to resources that will help guide them through the recognition, management, and prevention of water-related disease resulting from intentional acts of water terrorism.

**American College of Surgeons (ACS)**

- [Disasters from Biological and Chemical Terrorism – What Should the Individual Surgeon Do?: A Report from the Committee on Trauma](#)
- [Statement on Unconventional Acts of Civilian Terrorism: A Report from the Board of Governors](#)
- [Unconventional Civilian Disasters: What the Surgeon Should Know](#)

**Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)**[Terrorism-Related Agents, Diseases, and Threats](#)

Alphabetical listing of CDC resources on various biological, chemical, radiation, and natural disaster threats

**Center for Mental Health Services (CMHS)**[Mental Health Aspects of Terrorism](#)

Describes typical reactions to disasters with information on how to help affected persons cope with anxiety and emotional trauma

**Center for Public Health Preparedness, University of Albany School of Public Health**[Terrorism, Preparedness, and Public Health: An Introduction](#)

A free, six-lesson, online course for certificate and/or continuing education credit supported by a cooperative agreement from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention through the Association of Schools of Public Health. The objective of the course is to provide public health workers and community partners (EMS, police, fire, emergency room personnel, etc.) with key fundamental concepts related to public health emergency preparedness. The six lessons include:

- Introduction to terrorism
- Epidemiology, surveillance, detection, and identification
- Biological agents as weapons
- Chemical and industrial agents as weapons
- Radiological weapons
- Community planning and public health preparedness

**Center for Technology and National Security Policy, National Defense University**[Coping with a Biological, Chemical, and Dirty Bomb Attack](#)

A quick reference guide with charts and frequently asked questions on how to protect oneself from biological, chemical, and radiation threats

**Department of Homeland Security (DHS)**

[Ready.Gov](#)

Comprehensive Web site with general information on planning for any emergency

**eMedicine**

[Warfare – Biological, Chemical, Radiological, Nuclear, and Explosive](#)

An extensive list of online articles on the evaluation and treatment of victims exposed to various biological, chemical, explosive, incendiary, and radioactive agents, including personal protection measures

**Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)**

[Emergency Response to Terrorism Self-Study Manual](#)

Self-study course designed to provide learners with a general introduction to the basic concepts for first-responder awareness at the scene of a potential terrorist incident

[Terrorism](#)

General information and fact sheets about terrorism and FEMA's role in planning and response efforts

**National Academies**

[Radiological Attack: Dirty Bombs and Other Devices](#)

A factsheet from the National Academies and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security offers clear, objective information on "dirty bombs" and other devices that could be used in a radiological terrorist attack. Created for journalists participating in the Academies' News and Terrorism: Communicating in a Crisis workshops, this is the first in a series on weapons of mass destruction. Forthcoming fact-sheets will address chemical, biological, and nuclear attacks.

**National Association of EMS Physicians (NAEMSP)**

[Medical Response to Terrorism](#)

Developed by the NAEMSP, American Public Health Association, and National Association of State EMS Directors, this slide presentation is aimed at agencies, organizations, and individuals who must deal with the health consequences of a terrorist attack by summarizing important aspects associated with incidents involving weapons of mass destruction

**National Disaster Education Coalition**

[Terrorism](#)

Guidance for communicating with various audiences about terrorism and how to prepare for, respond to, and cope with a terrorist event.

**U.S. Fire Administration (USFA), Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)**

[Emergency Response to Terrorism – Job Aid](#)

Designed to assist first responders with tactical and strategic issues and considerations for the management of a possible terrorist/Weapons of Mass Destruction incident, including implementation of initial response actions.

## Virginia Emergency Management Agency

### [Terrorism Information: The Facts – How to Prepare – How to Respond](#)

Detailed information, in question-and-answer format, for health professionals and the public about all aspects of terrorist threats

### [Quick Reference Chart of Potential Terrorist Weapons and Threats](#)

[\[Back to beginning of this section.\]](#)

[\[Back to Main Table of Contents.\]](#)

Your feedback is welcome. E-mail comments to: [disastercd@ama-assn.org](mailto:disastercd@ama-assn.org).