



Anthrax Attack Remains Major National Security Threat



Ellen Cannon
Chicago Homeland Security Examiner

May 16th, 2011 8:47 am CT



At the May 13, 2011 House Homeland Security Subcommittee on Emergency Preparedness, Response, and Communications, Chair Gus Bilirakis (R-Florida) and Ranking member Laura Richardson (D-California) heard a

chilling warning from Alexander Garza, M.D., Chief Medical Officer of the Department of Homeland Security: *"The threat of an attack using a biological agent is real and requires that we remain vigilant. A wide area attack using aerosolized Bacillus anthracis, the bacteria that causes anthrax, is one of the most serious mass casualty biological threats facing the U.S. An anthrax attack could potentially encompass hundreds of square miles; expose hundreds of thousands of people, and cause illness, death, fear, societal disruption and economic damage. If untreated, the disease is nearly 100 percent fatal, which means that those exposed must receive life-saving medical countermeasures as soon as possible."*

Alexander Garza, M.D. is the Assistant Secretary for Health Affairs and Chief medical Officer for the U.S. Department of Homeland Security was one of several experts testifying on the current medical countermeasures to help mitigate biological threats and help prepare the nation to quickly detect and respond to a biological attack. This hearing was part II of the Subcommittee's efforts to explore the strengths and weaknesses regarding medical countermeasures should we experience large scale exposure to chemical, biological, radiological, or nuclear agents stemming from a disaster or terrorist attack. Part one of the Hearing took place on April 13, 2011.

Since 2004, the Department of Homeland Security has determined that 13 chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear agents pose a high consequence in terms of people exposed to the pathogens. These are anthrax, glanders, melioidosis, botulism toxin, Ebola virus, tularemia, a variety of hemorrhagic fevers, typhus, smallpox, plague, and radiological and nuclear materials. (Testimony Before the Subcommittee on Emergency Preparedness, Response, and Communications, Committee of Homeland Security, House of Representatives, of Cynthia Bascetta, 4/13/2011, GAO-11-567T)

Following the 2001 attacks using anthrax laced letters in the U.S. and other biological attacks, such as the Sarin gas attack in Japan, some members of Congress were concerned that the U.S. was vulnerable to threats from chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear (CBRN) agents and did not have sufficient medical counter-

measures to adequately protect the public from such threats or provide post-exposure treatment.

At the Hearing, Dr. Garza focused on the continued risk that anthrax poses and the extensive systemic medical countermeasures that continue to remain underdeveloped in our response to an attack.

His concern regarding shortcomings of the U.S. system regarding medical countermeasures to bioterrorism is not new. In January 2010, The Commission on the Prevention of Mass Destruction Proliferation and Terrorism, led by former Senators Bob Graham (D-Florida) and Jim Talent, (R-Missouri), gave the U.S. government an "F" for bioweapon preparedness. **"The absence of a comprehensive U.S. capability to rapidly recognize, respond to and recover from a disease based attack is the most significant failure identified in the final "report card"...The national capacity should include providing information to authorities and the general public; adequate supplies of medical countermeasures and program of rapid distribution of those medicines; systems for isolating and treating the sick; and environmental cleanup systems for materials such as anthrax."** (Martin Matishak, "Obama Administration Gets an "F": for Bioterrorism Defense, Global Security Newswire, 1/26/2010)

The commission stated, *"The clock is ticking and time is running out...Our major metropolitan areas are not prepared."* Mr. Talent noted, *"When you talk privately with people in the administration, they'll tell you we are nowhere on bioterrorism."* (homeland-securitynewswire.com/us-gets-f-preparation-threat-biological-terrorism, 1/29/2010) Mr. Talent added, **"Preventing a bioterror attack is difficult, so the best deterrent is a strong response mechanism. Terrorists will not attempt the attack if the nation is ready to respond quickly to limit injuries and deaths."**

The Los Angeles Times's Ken Dilanian wrote that our top bioterrorism experts acknowledge that the probability of such an event is low, but the failure to plan for it reflects the same lack of imagination that presaged the 9/11 attacks in 2001, Hurricane Katrina in 2005, and the gulf oil spill. (homelandsecuritynewswire.com/bioterrorism-experts-criticize-cuts-biosheild-pay-tea. 10/14/2010)

Original article may be found at:

<http://www.examiner.com/homeland-security-in-chicago/anthrax-attack-remains-major-national-security-threat>

For more information about STERIPLEX® Ultra (effective against Bacillus anthracis), BioSpray® Delivery Systems, Anthrax Countermeasure First Responder Certification and Anthrax EPA Compliance Certifications, see 1 Priority Biocidal, LLC website: www.go1bio.com/anthrax or (877) 799-0125

