

Preparing for Terrorism: Tools for Evaluating the Metropolitan Medical Response System Program

The Office of Emergency Preparedness (OEP) of the United States Department of Health and Human Services has been contracting with the most heavily populated U.S. cities in an effort to improve those cities' capabilities to respond to terrorism incidents on the scale of the September 11, 2001, attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. The central focus of this effort, the Metropolitan Medical Response System (MMRS) program, has been on unfamiliar chemical and biological agents. However, many of the requisite capabilities for dealing with the consequences of those agents are also necessary for effective response to an attack with explosives or radiological agents, as well as natural disasters. The contracts, which OEP has signed with 122 cities to date, provide cities with funds for special equipment and a cache of pharmaceutical and medical supplies; in turn, OEP requires detailed plans on how the city will organize and respond to chemical and biological terrorism incidents.

The Institute of Medicine (IOM) was asked to assist OEP in assessing the effectiveness of the MMRS program by developing appropriate evaluation methods, tools, and processes for use by OEP in evaluating both its own management of the program and local preparedness in the cities that have participated in the program.

In an interim report, the IOM committee charged with the study, developed a collection of almost 500 potential measures of local preparedness. The measures address activities such as initial identification of the toxic chemical or pathogen, decontamination, transportation, and treatment of victims. The measures include inputs, processes and outputs, such as medical treatment

protocols for the most dangerous chemicals and pathogens, collection of plausible early-warning indicators of a covert biological attack, and actual decontamination of victims of a chemical spill or simulated victims in a large-scale exercise. These measures formed the basis for the comprehensive assessment program presented in this report, *Preparing for Terrorism: Tools for Evaluating the Metropolitan Medical Response System Program*.

Preparing for Terrorism provides three evaluation tools and a three-part assessment method for managers of the MMRS program and others concerned about local capabilities for coping with chemical and biological (CBR) terrorism. The tools provided are a questionnaire survey eliciting feedback about the management of the MMRS program, a table of preparedness indicators for 23 essential response capabilities, and a set of three scenarios and related questions for group discussion. The three-part assessment method integrates document inspection, a site visit by a team of expert peer reviewers, and observations at community exercises and drills.

Both the MMRS program and the local preparedness to cope with terrorism that it seeks to enhance can and should be improved by a comprehensive evaluation program. Since both the nature of the threat and U.S. cities undergo continual change, preparedness to respond to a CBR attack must also undergo continual change. Therefore, it is important to conceptualize preparedness as a continual process rather than the achievement of a single final state. It is also necessary for the evaluation of preparedness to be a continual process rather than a one-time event.

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