

## McHenry County Department of Health

### How to recognize the signs of a possible bioterrorism event

Although the release of a bioterrorism agent would probably be covert, you can still be alert to what suspicious behaviors to watch for; if you notice these actions, contact local authorities because it may indicate that an incident is occurring.

- A person spraying an unidentified liquid powder into the air, especially inside a building. The sprayer could be as small as a common nasal spray or as large as a weed killer backpack sprayer. Also be alert for someone spraying near a ventilation grill.
- A person pouring an unidentified liquid or powder into a water source.
- It is important to understand that a terrorism looks like any other person. A person's actions, not their appearance, make them suspicious.
- If you see someone acting suspicious, call the authorities. Do not try to handle the situation alone.

Healthcare Workers also should be aware of any clues signaling a bioterrorism event.

- A cluster of illnesses among people who attended the same public event or gathering.
- An unusual increase in the number of patients with the following symptoms: bleeding disorders, encephalitis/meningitis, fever, gastrointestinal illnesses, muscle paralysis, pneumonia, rash or sepsis (blood infection).
- Illnesses occurring at an unusual time of the year (e.g. influenza in the summer).
- An unusual age distribution for common diseases (e.g. an increase of what appears to be chicken pox in adults).
- Illnesses occurring that are not common to a particular geographic region. Ill patients have no travel history to areas where the disease occurs naturally.
- Disease outbreaks in human and animal populations occurring at the same time.

Sources: The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)