

Anthrax Vaccine – Waste Not! Want Not!

- According to GAO¹ an estimated 1.5-2 million vaccine doses of the FDA-licensed anthrax vaccine stored in the Strategic National Stockpile (SNS) will go to waste each year. These doses could be saved and offered to Americans at high risk to anthrax bioterrorism.
- **Who should be considered for the vaccine?** Because the anthrax weapon is invisible, odorless, tasteless, and easily re-aerosolized the task of identifying the safe zone is nearly impossible.² As a result the vaccine must be considered for all who routinely respond to “white powder scares”.³ This group includes but is not limited to: police/security officers, fire fighters, paramedics/EMTs, public health officials, public works personnel, utilities employees, HAZMAT, SWAT and first receivers in emergency rooms.
- Learning from the two-wave, multi-site, deadly attacks via the US Postal Service in 2001, the vaccine is also appropriate for all Americans from groups victimized⁴ including mail/shipping carriers, media personalities, government officials and their staff.
- To bolster community resilience, the US Department of Labor has a [tool on its website](#) to help determine the credible risk of anthrax exposure/attack. It is suggested that a workplace in the Yellow or Red zone of this matrix should consider a pre-attack vaccination program for its employees.
- **Why not rely on antibiotics after an attack?** Pre-attack vaccination is the best strategy for preparedness to anthrax bioterrorism since the resultant immunity protects against anthrax disease inflicted by both antibiotic-sensitive and antibiotic-resistant organisms.⁵
- Experts agree future biological attacks will use anthrax that is resistant to all currently-stockpiled, pertinent antibiotics.^{6,7} In an attack with antibiotic-resistant strains of anthrax of sufficient dose, the antibiotics would afford no protection and the infection could quickly progress to death well before the vaccine mechanism of action would be expected to confer immunity to the victims.⁸
- Since the likely and worse-case attack scenario is with antibiotic-resistant anthrax, the prudent plan is a voluntary, pre-attack, vaccination⁹ for any person who self-assesses a high risk of exposure due to occupation, location of home/business, commute, or choice of recreation.
- **There is very little risk in this strategy.** The anthrax vaccine is FDA-licensed as safe and effective.¹⁰ As of 2008, over 1.8 million military personnel received nearly 7 million doses and the Institute of Medicine has stated that the rate of adverse events for this vaccine is similar to rates with other adult vaccines (flu, HAV, Tetanus).^{6, 11}
- **What is the demand for the vaccine or support for this?** Presently emergency responders (and many civilians) are expressing a wish to receive the vaccine according to the current FDA approved label.¹² The HHS Office of the Assistant Secretary of Preparedness and Response and the CDC Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) supports the use of the anthrax vaccine for emergency responders if the initiative is voluntary and based on an individual determination of risk. The vaccine in the SNS is already purchased and this reduces the cost of vaccination by 70%. Finally, vaccinating local emergency responders would bring their level of preparedness up to the federal standard of protection enjoyed by the National Guard Weapons of Mass Destruction Civilian Support Teams.¹³
- With the wisdom and courage to think ahead and with smart planning, the anthrax bioterrorism risk to Americans could be significantly mitigated by distributing the vaccine pre-attack through a voluntary program that administers the vaccine according to the current FDA-label.

References

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- ¹³ MILVAX. Information About the Anthrax Vaccine and the Anthrax Vaccine Immunization Program (AVIP)