

ISSUES TO CONSIDER: SMALLPOX RESPONSE PLANS

Smallpox is one of history's greatest scourges, and its eradication is one of medicine's greatest triumphs. Because it is both highly contagious and highly lethal, smallpox presents a preeminent threat as a biological weapon.

While all the countries represented in *Atlantic Storm* have smallpox response plans, which vary widely in their substance and length, all address roughly the same set of key issues:

1. Alert Levels

- Most countries have developed a system of "alert levels" that direct their actions for preparedness and response.
- Alert levels generally start at "zero," which signifies no cases of smallpox anywhere in the world, and progress upward through levels determined according to the number and location of suspected and/or confirmed smallpox cases.
- The most vigorous responses are triggered when smallpox cases appear within a given country's boundaries.

2. Smallpox Vaccine and Vaccination Strategies

- Countries have varying amounts of smallpox vaccine stockpiled for use in an emergency. Some countries have enough vaccine to cover every person in the nation, while others have minimal amounts that would cover less than 5% of their population.
- Most countries, and the World Health Organization, consider "ring vaccination" to be the preferred strategy for controlling the spread of disease. Ring vaccination is typically characterized by an effort to identify and vaccinate all of the direct contacts of confirmed smallpox victims, including friends, family members, and co-workers.
- Most countries indicate that if it appears that a smallpox epidemic cannot be controlled through ring vaccination, they would switch to mass vaccination, which is the vaccination of all individuals in an area (city, region, or entire country) regardless of exposure to the smallpox virus.
- In every country, the decision to switch to mass vaccination would be made by very senior government officials, but most plans do not specify or define specific triggers for the switch.

3. Command & Control

- All plans describe command and control structures to guide the nations' responses to a smallpox outbreak.
- The command and control structures vary greatly, ranging from centrally-organized responses by the federal government to highly devolved systems in which provincial or even local authorities are in charge of response.

4. Public Communication

- Most plans describe, in varying levels of detail, how government authorities would communicate with the public during a smallpox crisis.

5. International Communication & Cooperation

- Other than alerting international bodies such as the World Health Organization and other communication networks, most plans focus primarily on actions that would be taken within the borders of a given country, and do not discuss interactions with neighboring countries or the broader international community.

SCENARIO PLANNING ASSUMPTIONS: SMALLPOX RESPONSE PLANS AND METHODS FOR ACQUIRING THEM

Methodology for Summarizing National Smallpox Response Plans: *Atlantic Storm* was designed to illustrate the challenges of mounting an effective international response to bioterrorism. It was not intended to test individual nations' bioterrorism response plans. However, the people playing the roles of national leaders needed to be briefed on their nations' plans. Therefore, the smallpox response plans for the nations involved in the exercise were summarized by the exercise design team. All the summaries distributed during the exercise were reviewed by knowledgeable experts from the respective nations. From these summaries, one-page briefing memos were prepared for each participant.