Healthcare providers in Pierce County should be alert to illness patterns and diagnostic clues that might signal an unusual infectious disease outbreak due to the intentional release of a biological agent and should report these concerns immediately to Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department. The covert release of a biological agent will not have an immediate impact because of the delay between exposure and illness onset. Consequently, the first indication of a biologic attack may only be identified when ill patients present to physicians or other healthcare providers for clinical care.

Look for the following clinical and epidemiological clues that may be suggestive of a possible bioterrorist event:

- Any seriously ill patients with unexplained febrile illness associated with sepsis, pneumonia, adult respiratory distress, mediastinitis, or rash; or a botulism-like syndrome with flaccid muscle paralysis especially if occurring in otherwise healthy individuals
- Any case of a suspected or confirmed communicable disease that is not endemic in Pierce County (e.g., anthrax, plague, tularemia, smallpox, or viral hemorrhagic fever) or that occurs in a person without a travel history to an endemic area
- Any unusual age distributions for common diseases (e.g., an increase in what appears to be a chickenpox-like illness among adult patients)
- Any unusual temporal and/or geographic clustering of illness (e.g., persons who attended the same public event or religious gathering)
- Any sudden increase in the following non-specific syndromes, especially if illness is occurring in previously healthy individuals and there is an obvious common site of exposure:
  - Respiratory illness with fever
  - Gastrointestinal illness
  - Encephalitis or meningitis
  - Neuromuscular illness (e.g., botulism)
  - Fever with rash
  - Bleeding disorders
- Simultaneous disease outbreaks in human and animal populations

Some infections caused by biological agents present with a distinctive signs that can provide valuable diagnostic clues. In previously healthy persons presenting with a febrile illness, the following signs and symptoms are highly suggestive of infection with certain biological agents:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Diagnostic Sign</th>
<th>Disease</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Widened mediastinum</td>
<td>Inhalational anthrax</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pneumonia with hemoptysis</td>
<td>Pneumonic plague</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vesicular/pustular rash starting on face and hands, with all lesions at the same stage of development</td>
<td>Smallpox</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Similarly, microbiology laboratories should be alert to microbiologic clues that may indicate the presence of a potential bioterrorist agent. For example, blood cultures growing Gram-positive rods, especially if found in multiple cultures and/or the clinical syndrome is suggestive of anthrax, should be evaluated for Bacillus anthracis. Characteristics of B. anthracis include: Gram positive rods, often in chains; non-motile; non-hemolytic on sheep blood agar; positive for India Ink capsule stain if obtained from the blood; and a characteristic consistency of “beaten egg whites” when colonies are picked with an inoculating loop. All suspect cultures should be immediately referred to the Washington State Public Health Laboratory for further testing.

Most of the potential pathogens that could be used as a biologic weapon (e.g., anthrax, plague, and smallpox) would present initially as a non-specific flu-like illness. Therefore, an unusual pattern of respiratory or flu-like illness (e.g., occurring out of season or large numbers of previously healthy patients presenting simultaneously) should prompt clinicians to alert Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department. These disease patterns might represent an early start to the influenza season, the introduction of a new pandemic strain, or could be the initial warning of a bioterrorism event.

Any unusual cluster or manifestations of illness should be reported immediately to Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department. Call (253) 798-6410 or (253) 798-6500, press “0” to speak to an operator or follow prompts to answering services.

This material was adapted from a document developed by New York City Department of Health.
Recommendations for Management of Suspicious Substances

- Do not panic.
- Call 911 and report the situation to local law enforcement.
- DO NOT shake or empty the contents of any suspicious package.
- DO NOT carry the package or envelope, show it to others, or allow others to examine it.
- Put the envelope or package on a stable surface; do not touch, sniff, taste, or look closely at it or any contents that may have spilled.
- All persons should leave the area, close any doors and take actions to prevent others from entering the area. If possible, shut off the ventilation system.
- Remain on the premises and await instructions from law enforcement authorities and/or first responders.
- WASH hands carefully with soap and water to prevent powder from spreading to face or skin.
- If possible, list the names and contact information/telephone numbers for all people who were in the room or vicinity where the suspicious material was recognized. Provide this list to local first responders for follow-up investigations.
- For incidents involving possibly contaminated material, the environment in direct contact with the letter or its contents should be decontaminated with a solution of one part household bleach to 10 parts water, following a crime scene investigation. Personal effects may be decontaminated similarly.
- Patients should be instructed to shower with lots of soap and water as soon as possible. Do not use bleach or disinfectant on the skin.

For the most current information, visit www.bt.cdc.gov or call Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department at (253) 798-6410 or (253) 798-6500.

This material was adapted from a document developed by Washington State Department of Health.