

# Psychological Effects of Bioterrorism: Lessons From the Nation's Capitol

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# Acknowledgements

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09-11-01

YOU CAN NOT STOP US.

WE HAVE THIS ANTHRAX.

YOU DIE NOW.

ARE YOU AFRAID?

DEATH TO AMERICA.

DEATH TO ISRAEL.

ALLAH IS GREAT.



09-11-01

THIS IS NEXT

TAKE PENACILIN NOW

DEATH TO AMERICA

DEATH TO ISRAEL

ALLAH IS GREAT

4TH GRADE  
GREENDALE SCHOOL  
FRANKLIN PARK NJ 08852

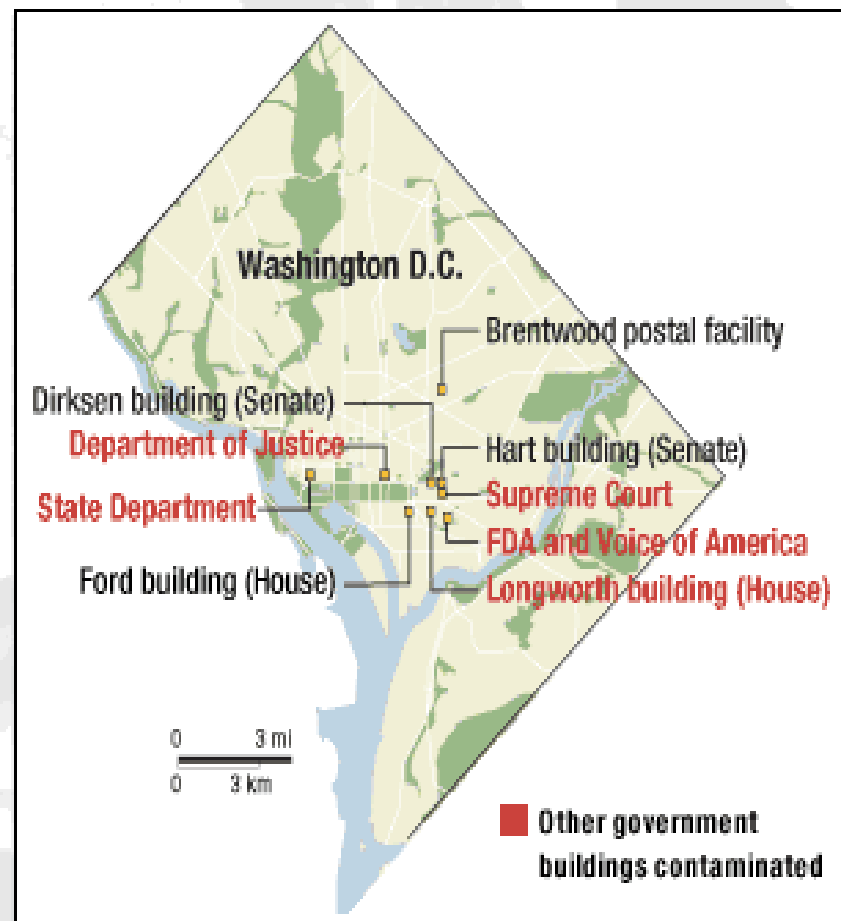
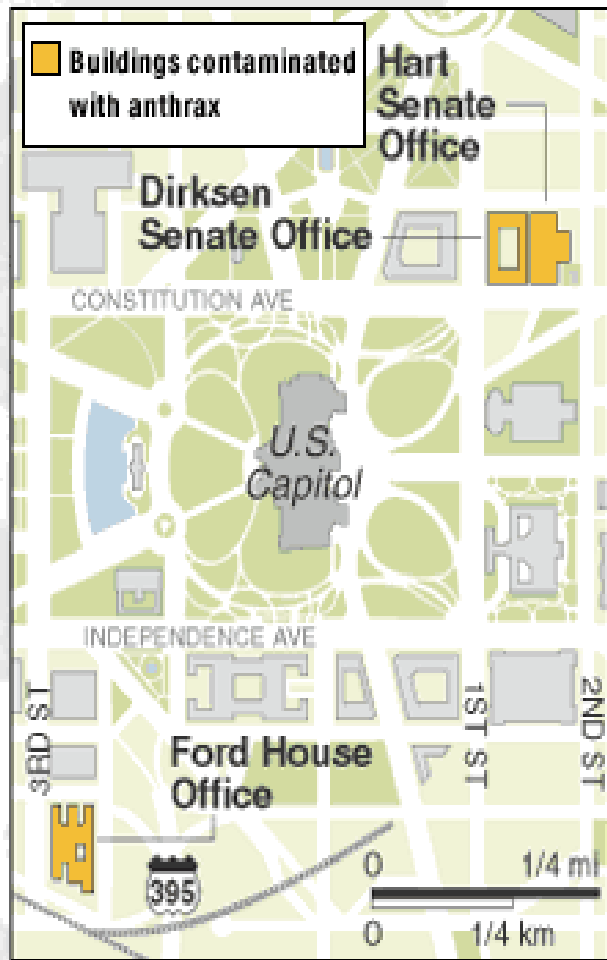


SENATOR LEAHY  
433 RUSSELL SENATE OFFICE  
BUILDING  
WASHINGTON D.C. 20510-4502

20520+4502



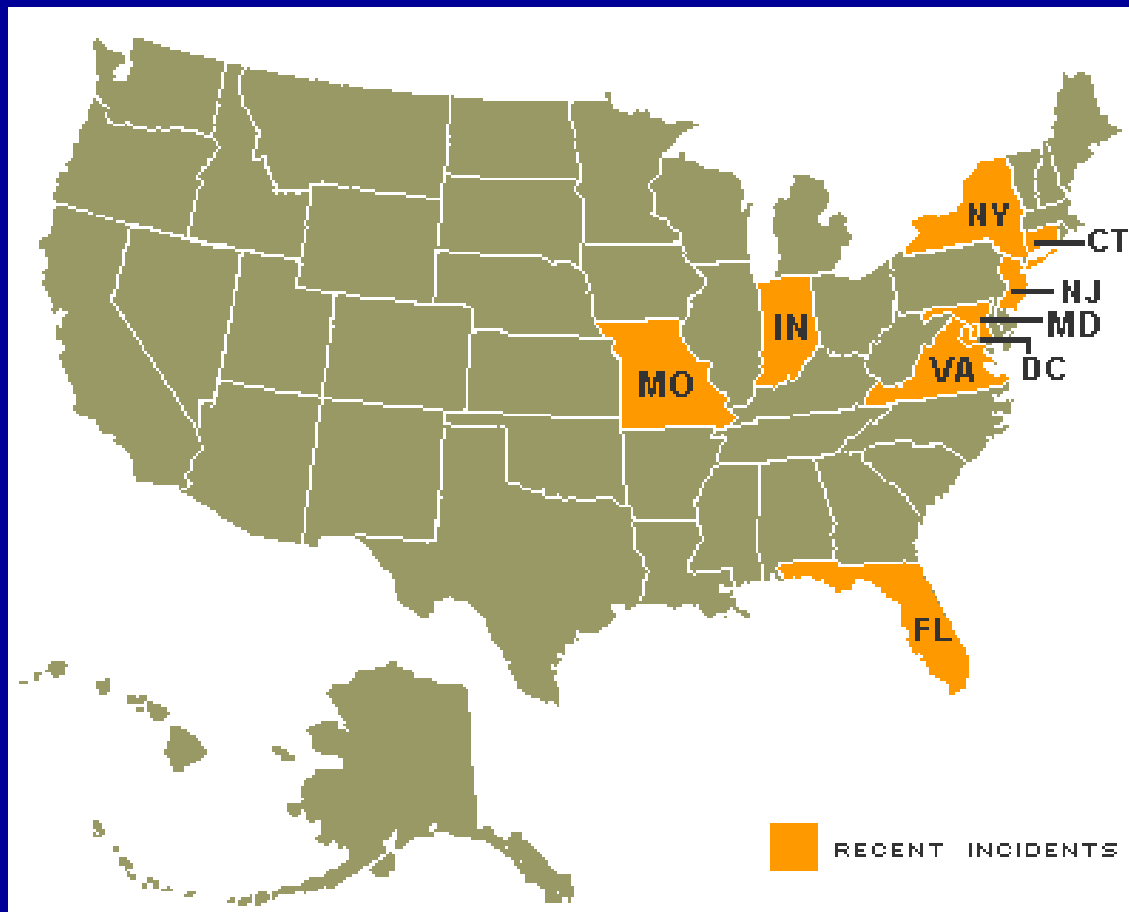
UNIVERSITY OF  
**Nebraska**  
Lincoln



CNN GFX/AP



# Confirmed Anthrax Contacts



# Unexpected Lethality Issues



# Lethality

- Five people have died from anthrax:  
94-year-old Ottilie Lundgren of Connecticut,  
61-year-old Kathy Nguyen of New York,  
two Washington postal workers, and  
a newspaper photo editor in Florida.
- Six others survived the severe inhaled form of  
anthrax, and at least seven others contracted the  
milder cutaneous form.
- Lundgren and Nguyen cases
  - not directly linked to anthrax-laden letters mailed to the  
media and Capitol Hill
  - Signs point toward cross-contaminated mail as the source of  
their infections, but no direct proof, and no spores have  
been found in either of their homes





# Anthrax Chronology

- Sept. 18, 2001: Anthrax letters sent to NBC News in New York and the New York Post
- Oct. 3: American Media Inc. photo editor Bob Stevens diagnosed with anthrax. Stevens Dies October 5, 2001.
- Oct. 15: Letter opened in the Washington office of U.S. Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle tests positive for anthrax.
- Oct. 16: U.S. Senate offices close as hundreds line up for tests. It is announced that the anthrax mailed to Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle is a pure and highly potent version.



# Anthrax Chronology

- Oct. 17: Congressional leaders arrange for an unprecedented shutdown after 31 people test positive for exposure to anthrax; the number is later dropped to 28. Those exposed include workers in the offices of Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle and Sen. Russell Feingold and USCP officers.
- Oct. 20: Anthrax spores are found in **the Ford Office Building, where mail is processed for legislators in the House of Representatives.** Also, a postal worker at the Brentwood post office in Washington D.C. is tested for anthrax.



# Anthrax Chronology

- Oct. 21: Thomas Morris Jr., 55, a Washington postal worker suspected of having inhalation anthrax, dies. Reports indicate that in a desperate 911 call hours before he died.
- Oct. 22: Joseph Curseen, 47, a Washington postal worker, dies of inhalation anthrax. Two more postal workers are hospitalized; nine others are ill with symptoms.
- Nov. 10 & 12: Small amounts of anthrax are discovered in 11 Senate office suites in the Hart Senate Office Building.
- Nov. 17: Capitol police close two Senate office buildings to test for anthrax spores after investigators discover a contaminated letter addressed to Sen. Patrick Leahy.



# Substantial Media Attention





# Leahy says anthrax letter could have killed 100,000

November 26, 2001

**WASHINGTON (CNN) -- Sen. Patrick Leahy, chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, said Sunday that an anthrax-laced letter mailed to his office may contain enough spores "to kill well over a 100,000 people," but he said the tainted missive had not yet been opened by investigators.**

Speaking on NBC's Meet the Press, Leahy, a Vermont Democrat, appeared to be basing his comments on the letter from an initial analysis of its exterior. Sources have said some spores seeped through the sealed envelope.

"It appears that the letter sent to me may contain enough spores to kill well over a 100,000 people, but it also may well have evidence, fingerprints or anything else," Leahy said.



# Ricin Attack Upon U.S. Capitol

- February 4, 2004
- Security tightened on Capitol Hill after the deadly poison ricin was found in Russell Senate Office Building on Capitol Hill



## Ricin: the castor poison

The castor bean is the source of ricin, a particularly deadly poison:



**What it is:** A protein toxin that can be derived from castor beans

**Methods of exposure:** Ingestion, inhalation or injection

**Symptoms:** If ingested, stomach irritation, bloody diarrhea, vomiting; if inhaled, severe lung damage and pulmonary edema. May also cause seizures or depress the central nervous system.

**Symptom onset:** Within 12 hours

**Results:** Respiratory or circulatory failure, fluid loss. May lead to death.

**Time of death:** 36-72 hours, depending on the dose

**Treatment:** No antidote or specific vaccine, but effects can be treated.

**Contagion:** Not spread from one person to another.

*Sources: Scotland Yard, Arizona Department of Health Services  
Researched by Times graphics reporter  
TOM REINHART*

*Los Angeles Times*



# Ricin Attack Upon Capitol





# Heightened Risk for First Responders



# First Responders

- Heightened risk to first responders
- Containment boundaries critical
- Conflicting duties between containment and investigation
- Heightened concern re: additional sources and secondary risks
- Awareness of first responders' risk to their own families



# Fear of Contamination Striking Home

“As a cop, I’m used to the idea that I could get hurt or killed in the line of duty. I’m not used to the fact that I could infect my kids when I hug them after work.



# What makes bioterrorism different psychologically from other trauma

- Continuing nature of threat
- Intensity of intervention activity
- Concern re: subsequent attacks or other undetected incidents



# What makes bioterrorism different psychologically from other trauma

- Invisible nature of threat
- Expanding boundaries of threat
- Uncertainty re: extent and nature of exposure
- Delayed onset of symptoms
- Tendency to minimize nature and potential effects of incident



# Lingering Reminders



# Lingering Reminders

- Clean-up and eradication
- Heightened and lingering concerns re: vulnerability given easy transmission of substances via mail
- Heightened hoax activity
- Smallest inconveniences serve as reminders





# Psychological Effects

- Staff must wrestle with idea that someone would deliberately expose them to anthrax
- The disruption of many office staff working in new location adds to the stress of the incident itself. Timelines often shifted and were uncertain.
- Financial concerns may exist (e.g., health, disability, personal effects).
- Family may have concerns for worker's safety. Workers may, in turn, may have increasing feelings of protectiveness for their families.





# Psychological Effects

Despite the fact that the majority of letters contaminated with anthrax spores have been addressed to congressional leaders and news anchors, those infected have not been the intended targets. Instead, the victims of the anthrax attacks have been primarily the postal workers and mailroom employees who typically handle the contaminated mail first, leaving many to wonder "Will I be next?"

Dr. Gerard Jacobs, American Red Cross Disaster Services  
Human Resources, American Red Cross release November  
21, 2001



# Practical Considerations and Lessons Learned

- Need to educate, educate, educate
- Understand concerns re: need for immediate education-- immediate hunger for information
- Education often invaluable when in multimodal and multimedia formats — however some may focus disproportionately on negative information
- Sensitivity to conflicting information

Be mindful of rumors



# Practical Considerations and Lessons Learned

## Safety Issues

- Respect containment procedures (for safety of yourself and others)
- Be sensitive to perceptions and concerns of potential continuing risk
- Respect possibility of future attack



# Practical Considerations and Lessons Learned

- Do not ignore additive effect of prior trauma (e.g., Weston Shooting, attempted 9/11 attack upon Capitol, multiple anthrax exposures and ricin attack.)
- Recognize emotional response to bioterror agents & attacks regardless of level of prior knowledge or training re: agents



# Practical Considerations and Lessons Learned

- Both possibility and heightened perception of continuing threat and risk-- even after initial exposure
- Respect the potential for lingering psychological after-effects given possible re-exposure or injury
- Some negative effects may be perpetuated by subsequent hoax activity

