



**Atlantic County Public Health
Emergency Preparedness
Task Force**

**Atlantic County Interim Bioterrorism &
Public Health Emergency Plan
Executive Summary
March 2003**

Atlantic County Interim Bioterrorism & Public Health Emergency Plan Executive Summary

A Proactive Approach to Prepare for Emergencies

In October 2001, Atlantic County Executive Dennis Levinson established the Atlantic County Public Health Emergency Preparedness Task Force. The Task Force was charged with developing a comprehensive plan to ensure the rapid detection and coordinated response to incidents of bioterrorism and other disease outbreaks or public health threats.

The Atlantic County Interim Bioterrorism & Public Health Emergency Plan is a work-in-progress and should be considered interim in nature. Future editions will be released as the plan develops more fully. The plan builds upon existing emergency response procedures and responsibilities at local, state and federal levels. This includes the existing Atlantic County Emergency Operations Plan that already contains a Terrorism Annex with a Weapons of Mass Destruction Appendix. The Bioterrorism & Public Health Emergency Plan was modeled after a similar plan developed by the DeKalb-Fulton County Health Department under contract with the US Department of Health & Human Services.

Elements of the Plan: Task Force Structure

The Task Force consists of representatives from major medical, public health, law enforcement and emergency rescue agencies that have primary responsibility for responding to critical public health emergencies. Freeholder Chairman Kirk Conover was appointed Chairman of the Task Force. The following agencies are represented on the Task Force:

- Atlantic County Board of Chosen Freeholders
- Atlantic County Administration
- Atlantic County Division of Public Health
- Atlantic County Office of Emergency Preparedness
- Atlantic County Prosecutors Office
- Atlantic City Health Department
- Atlantic City Fire Department

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- Atlantic City Medical Center
- Bacharach Institute for Rehabilitation
- Shore Memorial Hospital
- William B. Kessler Memorial Hospital
- Trump Resorts
- Hamilton Township Fire Department
- New Jersey American Water Company
- Atlantic County Utilities Authority

In developing this plan, the Task Force established the following ad hoc committees:

- Hospital
- Public Safety / First Responder
- Public Health
- Public Information / Education

Additional members joined the subcommittees to offer their expertise in reviewing various response sector action plans.

Elements of the Plan: Key Functions

Any type of bioterrorist attack or public health emergency would require a comprehensive response effort involving all levels of government. The Task Force identified five key functions for detecting and responding to public health emergencies. Depending on the nature of the event, governmental agencies will have either a primary or supportive role in the following functions:

1. **Detection & Diagnosis:** Through ongoing disease surveillance programs, the Atlantic County Division of Public Health and Atlantic City Health Department track cases of reportable diseases, report on unusual disease occurrences and investigate outbreaks.

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2. **Incident Management:** Any public health emergency demands that federal, state and local organizations coordinate their effort to manage the situation and protect public health.

Using “unified command”, individuals from the fields of law enforcement, health, public information and emergency operations will work together to ensure an effective response to any emergency.

3. **Prevention & Control:** In a public health emergency, the appropriate agencies will investigate the source and type of threat, provide medical care to those who are ill, protect the public and offer mental health services as needed.

4. **Fatality Management:** Working with local hospitals and law enforcement, the Medical Examiner will ensure that the victims of a public health emergency are treated with dignity and respect and that the incident is promptly investigated.

5. **Environmental Surety:** Following any public health crisis, emergency workers and public health officials will perform all necessary environmental tests and clean-up duties to contain and eliminate the source of threat.

Elements of the Plan: Sectors of Response

Each Task Force subcommittee developed specific action steps that would guide their response in the case of a public health emergency. Action steps were formulated for the following sectors of response:

1. **Public Health:** In the event of an emergency, the mission of the public health sector is to preserve life and minimize risk, investigate threats, maintain surveillance systems, coordinate medical and mental health care, provide health-related information, provide essential public health services and maintain/create safe public environments.

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2. **Local Hospitals:** Area hospitals will contribute to emergency management by providing medical care to patients, containing infection, and educating patients, visitors and staff. Hospitals will also work with government agencies to manage the incident and protect health.

3. **Law Enforcement:** By conducting criminal investigations, evidence collection, intelligence-gathering and information dissemination, local law enforcement officials will help to preserve human life while protecting the integrity and effectiveness of an emergency response effort.

4. **Emergency Management:** In a public health crisis, the emergency management sector will coordinate all response activities, facilitate solutions to logistical problems and ensure that all necessary resources are dedicated to the response effort.

5. **Fire Service:** Individuals in local fire departments will respond to emergencies by coordinating the collection of samples and identifying harmful agents. They will also assist in decontamination procedures.

6. **Emergency Medical Service:** By developing an ongoing system of crisis medical care, the emergency medical service will facilitate patient care, coordinate delivery of medical services and save lives.

7. **Public Information and Education:** Whatever the emergency, the public needs accurate, up-to-date information. In a health emergency, the public information and education sector will work with the media, develop educational materials and disseminate clear and concise public health messages.

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In addition to specific action steps for each response sector, the Task Force subcommittees also developed forms and attachments that will be important resources in the case of an emergency.

Examples of these forms include:

- Illness assessment and bioterrorism surveillance forms that will assist public health officials in collecting vital epidemiological information.
- Notification protocols and updated contact lists to assist in a rapid response to initial reports of illness.
- Sample news releases and disease fact sheets to facilitate the dissemination of timely, accurate information.
- Guidance and protocol documents from federal and state agencies to serve as reference materials.

A Continuing Effort

The Atlantic County Interim Bioterrorism & Public Health Emergency Plan will remain a working document to be used in conjunction with other established emergency operating plans. The Atlantic County Public Health Emergency Preparedness Task Force will continue to meet on a regular basis to update the plan and review new information as it becomes available.

Subcommittees will also meet to formalize sections of the plan and modify action steps as necessary. For example, the Public Health subcommittee is continuing to develop a mass immunization and prophylaxis plan. Various mass-vaccination sites around the county are being examined and will be utilized if the need arises. The Hospital subcommittee is addressing issues such as physician credentialing and decontamination of patients.

For more information about the Atlantic County Interim Bioterrorism & Public Health Emergency Plan or the ongoing efforts of the Atlantic County Public Health Emergency Preparedness Task Force, contact the Atlantic County Division of Public Health at 609-645-5935.