

Study: Doctors not ready for bioterrorism

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A Johns Hopkins University study in Baltimore indicates many U.S. physicians are ill-prepared to diagnose or treat bioterrorism diseases.

The researchers said more than one-half of 631 physicians tested were unable to correctly diagnose diseases caused by agents most likely to be used by bioterrorists -- smallpox, anthrax, botulism and plague.

However, test scores improved dramatically for the same physicians after they completed an online training course in diagnosing and managing diseases caused by bioterrorism agents.

"Most American physicians in practice today have never seen any cases of these diseases in their practice," explained Dr. Sara Cosgrove, a faculty member in Hopkins' Division of Infectious Diseases.

"Preparation will be key to dealing with a major catastrophe, such as a major bioterrorist attack."

In the study, physicians at 30 internal medicine residency programs in 16 states and Washington, D.C. were tested on how to recognize and treat bioterrorism-related diseases before and after taking an online course in bioterrorism disease. Correct management of such diseases in the pretest averaged 25.4 percent. Upon completion of the course, correct management averaged 79 percent.

The study is detailed in the Sept. 26 issue of Archives of Internal Medicine.

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