

# **Bioterrorism and Infectious Agents: A New Dilemma for the 21st Century**

# Emerging Infectious Diseases of the 21st Century

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# **Bioterrorism and Infectious Agents: A New Dilemma for the 21st Century**

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# Preface

Since the terrorist attack on the United States on September 11, 2001 and subsequent cases of anthrax in Florida and New York City, attention has been focused on the threat of biological warfare and bioterrorism. Biological warfare agents are defined as “living organisms, whatever their nature, or infected material derived from them, which are used for hostile purposes and intended to cause disease or death in man, animals and plants, and depend for their efforts on the ability to multiply in person, animal or plant attacked.” Biological warfare agents may be well suited for bioterrorism to create havoc and terror in a civilian population, because they are cheap and easy to obtain and dispense.

Infectious or contagious diseases have played a major part in the history of warfare – deliberately or inadvertently – in restricting or assisting invading armies over the centuries. In 1346, the Tartars catapulted plague-infected bodies into Kaffa in the Crimea to end a 3-year siege. Blankets contaminated with smallpox to infect North American Indians were used by British forces in the 18th century. More recently, the Japanese released fleas infected with plague in Chinese cities in the 1930s and 1940s.

Biological research programs for both offensive and defensive strategies have been developed by the United States, Britain, the former Soviet Union, and Canada; several other nations are thought to have such programs.

Thus, it is important that physicians and health care personnel on the front line (Emergency physicians, Public Health personnel, Internists, Infectious Disease specialists, Microbiologists, Critical care specialists, and even General practitioners) be aware of the clinical manifestations, diagnosis, and management of these potentially deadly diseases. Awareness is the key to recognition of a bioterrorism attack. Thus, this volume will provide health care workers with up-to-date important reviews by world-renowned experts on infectious and biological agents that could be used for bioterrorism.

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