

## **Role of NPHL in Responding to Bioterrorism**

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The previous edition of the Nebraska Public Health Laboratory Newsletter described issues regarding the transportation of infectious agents. It was further reported that the NPHL was collaborating with the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services (NHHS), and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), to provide diagnostic services for infectious organisms due to accidental exposure or from acts of bioterrorism. This issue of the NPHL Newsletter is an update on the progress made concerning laboratory preparedness for such events.

In the past several years, it has become apparent that terrorist organizations have acquired the technology and the reagents for launching an attack using biological agents. The experience with the bombing in Oklahoma City showed officials that terrorism may occur in any location in the country and is not just a problem of the east or west coast. In addition to the public airport and the Offutt Military base, the two major transportation corridors of Interstates 80 and 29 pose an additional risk to Nebraskans from the accidental spill of infectious waste or reagents. Refer to the summary of the Lincoln Journal Star article in this issue about the recent incident in Nebraska. Hospital laboratories throughout the state should be prepared to encounter situations that may be due to intentional or unintentional exposure to certain organisms such as the plague or anthrax bacillus. One of the most likely scenarios is that local hospital laboratories will notice the unusual occurrence of rarely seen infectious diseases such as tularemia. The article by Tony Sambol, Coordinator of the Bioterrorism Preparedness Laboratory at the NPHL, discusses procedures for dealing with these situations. Fact sheets, such as the one included here are being developed for all relevant organisms. We will be making direct mailings to Nebraska microbiology laboratories in the near future.