All Wrapped Up in Red (Cross) (Duct) Tape

By ACSH Staff — September 2, 2004

Americans are understandably concerned about the possibility of new terrorist attacks. Public health professionals from around the country have urged that people be "prepared." But what does that mean?

Apparently, to the Red Cross it means selling people "preparedness" kits for $49.95 -- and that is per person.

Each Red Cross kit includes a breathing mask, duct tape, food bars, two quarts of water, a radio (with batteries), and a blanket.

But will this Red Cross kit really protect you -- for three days -- as they claim?

No, not really. Forget the kit. Use some common sense instead.

--You do not need the duct tape -- even though Federal Officials have also, on occasion, recommended it. In the case of aerosol release of chemical, biological or radiological agents, it is highly unlikely that duct tape would provide any significant level of protection -- any more protection than simply closing the windows and turning off the ventilation system.

--You probably do not need the masks either. Protection of airways is a very important step to take in a chemical, biological, or radiological attack. The problem is that most currently available masks would not be very protective -- and it is unlikely that you would have it with you when the attack took place. In most WMD scenarios with invisible or dust-like weapons, you would probably not be aware of the exposure and would have had no reason to put on the mask. The lone exception might be the detonation of a "dirty bomb" that dispersed radiological materials. But a wet cloth over your mouth and nose would probably be enough to protect you.

You do not need to buy a $50 Red Cross "kit" to protect you and your family. Instead, keep a supply of water on hand (two to three gallons per person), three days of nonperishable foods, a first aid kit, disposable paper cups, plates and plastic utensils, a battery-operated radio, and a flashlight and extra batteries. You can pick these supplies up at K-mart, Wal-Mart, or a comparable vendor -- for $25 or less -- and be well prepared. (It's also a good idea to have a supply of any prescription medicines you need on hand.)
