Protect Yourself from Terrorism

By ACSH Staff — September 10, 2007

With the sixth anniversary of terrorist attacks approaching, it is easy to feel helpless and scared about what some believe to be an inevitable future attack. But there are things you can do to protect yourself:

1. Keep your ears and eyes open. Report any suspicious behavior. Watch for unusually dressed people (long sleeves or overcoat on a warm day) or people wearing protective gear. Look out for unattended packages.

2. If you find yourself inside a building in the vicinity of an explosion (which may or may not be a "dirty bomb" that includes radioactive materials), stay inside and try to move to a higher floor with the fewest open windows and vents. If you are outside, get indoors immediately, covering your mouth and nose with a cloth. Wash any exposed skin with soap and water.

3. Don't stockpile medicine. There is enough medicine to handle a biochemical emergency even in a city as big as New York. The Strategic National Stockpile has life-saving pharmaceuticals, antidotes and other supplies in case of a chemical attack.

4. If you think you have been exposed to anthrax, see a physician for treatment immediately. Early treatment protects you from the potentially life-threatening effects of anthrax. (Having a week's supply of Cipro on hand is not recommended, but also would not hurt.)

5. Wash your hands regularly. The transmission of infectious agents can occur through the skin. Regular hand-washing with soap and water will reduce your risk of infection.

6. Forget the gas masks. Unless they are exactly fitted for you, they are useless and can be dangerous.

7. Adults should forget the KI (potassium iodide pills). Individuals over the age of 30 receive no protection from them in the event of a nuclear accident -- and KI will not protect you from a dirty bomb. There is evidence, though, that taking KI after a radiation exposure can saturate a young person's thyroid gland and protect it by making it "filled up" so radioactive iodine cannot settle there.

8. Have a family emergency plan including contact telephone numbers and alternative places to meet in case family members cannot get home.

9. Have an emergency supply kit with water, a three-days supply of non-perishable food, a first aid kit, paper cups and plates, batteries, a battery-operated radio and flashlight.

10. Maintain some perspective on terrorism. Be aware that our country is not just sitting back "waiting for the other shoe to drop." Our government and military are becoming increasingly
prepared to deal with future attacks. Rely on trusted sources of information -- and verify the accuracy of media reports before you act.

Dr. Elizabeth Whelan is President of the American Council on Science and Health and editor of A Citizen's Guide to Terrorism Preparedness and Response [1].


Links