

Northwest PUBLIC HEALTH

Veterinarians and Public Health: Sharing Information in Idaho

Leslie Tengelsen

Many of the agents of bioterrorism, such as anthrax, plague, and brucellosis, are zoonotic (can infect both humans and animals). In the event of a bioterrorism attack, especially in rural states such as Idaho, the first responders may not be police, fire, or FBI; they may be the large-animal veterinarian who notices an anthrax outbreak in a herd of cattle that is unexplained by natural causes or the small-animal veterinarian who diagnoses plague in sneezing cats in a non-endemic area.

The Idaho Department of Health and Welfare Office of Epidemiology and the Idaho Department of Agriculture Division of Animal Industries have been developing joint, enhanced surveillance activities between the veterinary and medical communities. They have distributed newsletters to practicing veterinarians and physicians encouraging reporting of zoonotic diseases. They have also spoken at numerous society and association meetings to disseminate information and encourage disease reporting. For emergencies, veterinarians and physicians are encouraged to contact the Idaho State Communications Center, a 24-hour response hotline that can bring together content experts and health officials any time, day or night. Information regarding any potential animal or animal product source of infection is shared with the Department of Agriculture and investigated by both veterinary and public health professionals.

Bioterrorist events cannot always be prevented solely through enhanced intelligence gathering and intervention by law enforcement. Professionals in allied health and agricultural sectors must report and respond to unusual events so that the effect of a bioterrorist event can be diminished by rapid public health and veterinary interventions. This is particularly important in Idaho, a rural, agricultural state economically dependent on the animal industry.

Leslie Tengelsen PhD, DVM, is deputy state epidemiologist with the Office of Epidemiology, Idaho Department of Health and Welfare.

This article appears as a sidebar in *Outbreak in Wyoming: Deer Flies or Bioterrorism?*