



# House Select Committee on Homeland Security

Democrats

**JIM TURNER, Ranking Member**

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## **NEW REPORT SHOWS MOST COMMUNITIES UNPREPARED FOR A BIOTERROR ATTACK**

Jim Turner, Ranking Member of the House Select Committee on Homeland Security, and Dr. Donna Christensen (D-V.I.), a Select Committee member, released a new report today revealing that three years after 9/11 and the 2001 anthrax attacks, the vast majority of America's state and local governments are unprepared for a major bioterror attack or infectious disease outbreak. The report – *Bioterrorism: America Still Unprepared* – is based on surveys of state and local health departments who report that they do not have the resources to meet federal preparedness standards.

Since 1999, the federal government has spent over \$2 billion to stockpile millions of doses of antibiotics and vaccines in the Strategic National Stockpile. However, this program depends on state and local public health agencies to deliver these medicines to the public.

**“Stockpiling is useless unless you can provide these medicines to people in time to save their lives. The Administration has failed, however, to prepare our state, city, and county health departments to protect their populations from anthrax, smallpox, or pandemic flu. Instead of trying to fix the problem, this Administration has gone backwards by cutting resources, choosing a course that is only making a bad situation worse,”** said Turner.

**“This report demonstrates that public health must be an integral part of our national security,”** Dr. Christensen stated. **“We need to fortify these systems to protect the lives and health of our citizens.”**

The report notes that the Department of Health and Human Services would not release preparedness information to the Committee, so Turner's staff conducted its own survey. Survey results from 41 states showed that:

- Only three states have reached a “green” status, the highest level of preparedness;
- Four states remain at “red” status;
- Fifteen states have improved their status from 2003 to 2004, but four states have lost ground, including two who have slipped from “amber” to “red.”

According to a survey of 63 local health departments:

- Only 21% can deliver medicines to their population within 48 hours, a time necessary to prevent mass casualties from an airborne anthrax or plague attack, or tens of thousands of cases of a pandemic influenza.
- Only 23% can vaccinate their populations against smallpox within 96 hours, a time necessary to prevent mass casualties from a smallpox release.
- Only 32% have conducted drills to test local antibiotic and vaccine distribution plans.

According to the majority of state and local health officials contacted for this report, reductions in federal funding assistance have undermined preparedness. Funding for public health preparedness has declined by 18 percent since fiscal year 2003, with another 11 percent cut proposed by President Bush for fiscal year 2005. Local agencies indicated a lack of funds, guidance, and training were hurting staffing, transportation, equipment, exercising, and planning aspects of an emergency public health response.

**“This is just another example of the gap between the rhetoric of this Administration and the reality of its commitment on protecting the homeland and fighting terrorism”,** said Turner. **“Our terrorist enemies are not going to wait for us to get ready. We must do all we can, as fast, as we can, to protect the United States from a biological attack or the outbreak of a pandemic influenza,”** he added.

The full report is available at: <http://www.house.gov/hsc/democrats/>

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