

AVOIDING ARMAGEDDON

Our Future. Our Choice.

Biological and Chemical Terrorism: Becoming Prepared

Grades: 9-12

Subject: Social Studies (global studies, government)

Background: According to the White House, “The possibility of the intentional use of biological or other dangerous agents represents a threat to our society. Unfortunately, the medical treatments available for some types of terrorist attacks have improved little in decades, while there has been tremendous and rapid progress in the treatment of many serious naturally-occurring diseases.” There are numerous countries around the world that have offensive biological and chemical weapons programs. The risk of terrorist groups acquiring these types of weapons has increased tremendously. This lesson helps students understand the nature of these threats and how to offset them through preparedness. This lesson can be used independently or in conjunction with Episode One of “Avoiding Armageddon” — “Silent Killers: Poisons and Plagues.”

Tools and Materials:

Paper and Pen

Access to the Internet

Time Needed: Two to three class periods

Teaching Strategies:

Preparation

- Begin asking students to share what they know about biological or chemical terrorism and what they feel the threat is to the average citizen. (If possible, view Episode One of “Avoiding Armageddon.”)
- Next, break up into teams to research the threat, using this Web site and the resources listed. Ask students to address following questions:
 1. What specifically are biological and chemical threats?
 2. How easy is it to manufacture each agent?
 3. How stable is each agent?
 4. What are the lethal effects of each?
 5. What is the likelihood of an attack using any of the above agents?

Activity

- After presenting and studying students’ findings, divide the class into four groups:
 1. Local Government: mayor, police chief, fire chief, health department director, city council president, district attorney, hazardous materials team chief, concerned citizens group head.
 2. County Government: emergency management director, health department director, public works department director, waste management director, concerned citizens group head.

3. State Government: governor, state police chief, department of health director, state epidemiologist, state attorney general, legislative leadership, director of state department of environmental quality, head of national guard, concerned citizens group head.
 4. National Government: president, cabinet members, health department head, EPA director, Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) director, FBI director, Attorney General, director of Homeland Security, Congressional leaders, Centers for Disease Control head, concerned citizens group head.
- Each student assumes the role of an administrative assistant to one of the people in their assigned group. Their responsibility is to first research the issue, then develop policies to be presented to each leader as to what should be done to prepare for a possible biological or chemical attack on each locality.
 - Working together each group will then develop a plan appropriate for each level of government.
 - The class will then hold a Forum of government leaders; and each plan will be presented, debated and voted on to determine an appropriate course of action for all U.S. citizens.

Extensions/Adaptations:

- Arrange for relevant community leaders (those responsible for community response to a threat of biological or chemical terrorist attack) to speak to the class.
- Have students organize a public forum for the community to discuss community needs to respond to threats posed by a possible biological or chemical terrorist attack. Use material found on the U.S. Department of Homeland Security Web site — “Be Ready” <http://www.ready.gov/>.
- Have students write to city council members or other local government officials with specific questions regarding community preparedness in case of a biological or chemical terrorist attack.
- Have students develop a “preparedness plan” for their school—have them then contact school district officials to determine the district’s plan.
- Have students discuss with their family how to prepare a family preparedness plan (using the material presented by the American Red Cross (<http://www.redcross.org>) or the “Be Ready” Web site). Share the plan with the class.

Resources:

Centers for Disease Control
Facts about Anthrax, Botulism, Pneumonic Plague & Smallpox
<http://www.bt.cdc.gov/Agent/agentlist.asp>

Centers for Disease Control
Programs in Brief – Bioterrorism
<http://www.cdc.gov/programs/bio.htm>

Centers for Disease Control
Notification Procedures – Protocols
<http://www.bt.cdc.gov/EmContact/Protocols.asp>

Centers for Disease Control
Public Health Preparedness & Response – Links

<http://www.bt.cdc.gov/Links.asp>

Center for Strategic and International Studies
The Threat of Bioterrorism & the Spread of Infectious Diseases

<http://www.csis.org/hill/ts010905cilluffo.htm>

National Symposium on Medical and Public Health Response to Bioterrorism

<http://www.hopkins-id.edu/bioterror/agenda.html>

NOVA: Bioterror

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/bioterror/>

Online NewsHour

Bioterrorism: Understanding and Preparing for the Threat

<http://www.pbs.org/newshour/health/bioterrorism.html>

Protecting Americans from the Threat of Bioterrorism

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/response/protecting.html>

About the Author:

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