



# CDC's Roles in the Event of a Nuclear or Radiological Terrorist Attack

Because of the terrorist events of 2001, people have expressed concern about the possibility of a terrorist attack involving radioactive materials. During and after such an incident, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) would assist state, local, and territorial authorities in protecting people's health and offer advice on steps that people can take to reduce their exposures to radiation. CDC has prepared this fact sheet to help people understand the roles and responsibilities of CDC during such an incident.

### Government Structure

CDC is a part of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), which includes the National Institutes for Health (NIH), the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), and several other health and family services agencies. As part of HHS, CDC is recognized as the federal agency that protects the health and safety of people. CDC's overall goal is to improve the health of the people of the United States. CDC reaches this goal through disease control and prevention, environmental health, and health promotion and education activities.

### National Response Plan

In January of 2005, the National Response Plan (NRP, [www.dhs.gov/dhspublic/display?content=4264](http://www.dhs.gov/dhspublic/display?content=4264)) was initiated. This plan is designed to provide a unified joint response from all federal agencies to any type of incident, from natural disasters, such as earthquakes and hurricanes, to terrorist attacks, such as the explosion of a dirty bomb ([www.bt.cdc.gov/radiation/dirtybombs.asp](http://www.bt.cdc.gov/radiation/dirtybombs.asp)) or the release of anthrax ([www.bt.cdc.gov/agent/anthrax](http://www.bt.cdc.gov/agent/anthrax)). This plan outlines the tasks that various government agencies will fulfill during a national emergency.

The NRP includes several Annexes, which are designed to address the federal response to a variety of specific incidents. The Nuclear/Radiological Annex describes how the various federal agencies will work together to help state, local, and territorial governments respond to a large-scale nuclear or radiological incident.

Under the NRP and the Nuclear/Radiological Annex, HHS has the major role in protecting people's health through:

- Monitoring, assessing, and following up on people's health
- Ensuring the safety of workers involved in and responding to the incident
- Ensuring that the food supply is safe
- Providing medical and public health advice

### CDC's Roles

As part of HHS, CDC would be the chief public health entity to respond to a radiological incident, whether accidental or intentional. As the chief public health entity, CDC's specific roles and responsibilities would include:

- Assessing the health of people affected by the incident
- Assessing the medical effects of radiological exposures on people in the community, emergency responders and other workers, and high-risk populations (such as children, pregnant women, and those with immune deficiencies)
- Advising state and local health departments on how to protect people, animals, and food and water supplies from contamination by radioactive materials

## CDC's Roles in the Event of a Nuclear or Radiological Terrorist Attack

(continued from previous page)

- Providing technical assistance and consultation to state and local health departments on medical treatment, follow-up, and decontamination of victims exposed to radioactive materials
- Establishing and maintaining a registry of people exposed to or contaminated by radioactive materials

### CDC's Partners

To carry out its roles, CDC would work with many other agencies to ensure that people's health is protected. These agencies may include:

- State and Local Health Departments
- Department of Homeland Security (DHS)
- Department of Defense (DoD)
- Department of Energy (DOE)
- Department of Transportation (DOT)
- HHS
  - Food and Drug Administration (FDA)
  - Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR)
  - Office of Emergency Response (OER)
  - Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA)
  - Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)
- Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)
- Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI)
- Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)
- Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC)
- Department of Agriculture (USDA)

### CDC's Actions

In the hours and days following a radiological incident, CDC would assist and advise the state and local health departments on recommendations that the community would need to:

- Protect people from radioactive fallout
- Protect people from radioactive contamination in the area
- Safely use food and water supplies from the area
- Assess and explain the dangers in the area of the incident
- Monitor people ([www.bt.cdc.gov/radiation/populationmonitoring.asp](http://www.bt.cdc.gov/radiation/populationmonitoring.asp)) for contamination ([www.bt.cdc.gov/radiation/contamination.asp](http://www.bt.cdc.gov/radiation/contamination.asp)) with radioactive materials and exposure to radiation

CDC also will have representatives on the Advisory Team for Environment, Food, and Health (sometimes referred to as the A-Team), a collection of experts from a variety of federal agencies that advise state, local, and territorial governments on ways to protect people and the environment following a radiological incident.

If necessary, CDC would also deploy the Strategic National Stockpile, a federal store of drugs and medical supplies set aside for emergency situations.

In addition, CDC would give workers in the area information on:

- The amount of time they can safely work in an area contaminated with radioactive materials
- Equipment needed to protect themselves from radiation and radioactive materials
- Types of respiratory devices needed to work in the contaminated area
- How to use radiation monitoring devices

### Radiation Exposure Registry

Following an incident involving radioactive materials, CDC/ATSDR would establish an exposure registry. The purpose of this registry would be to monitor people's exposure to radiation and perform dose

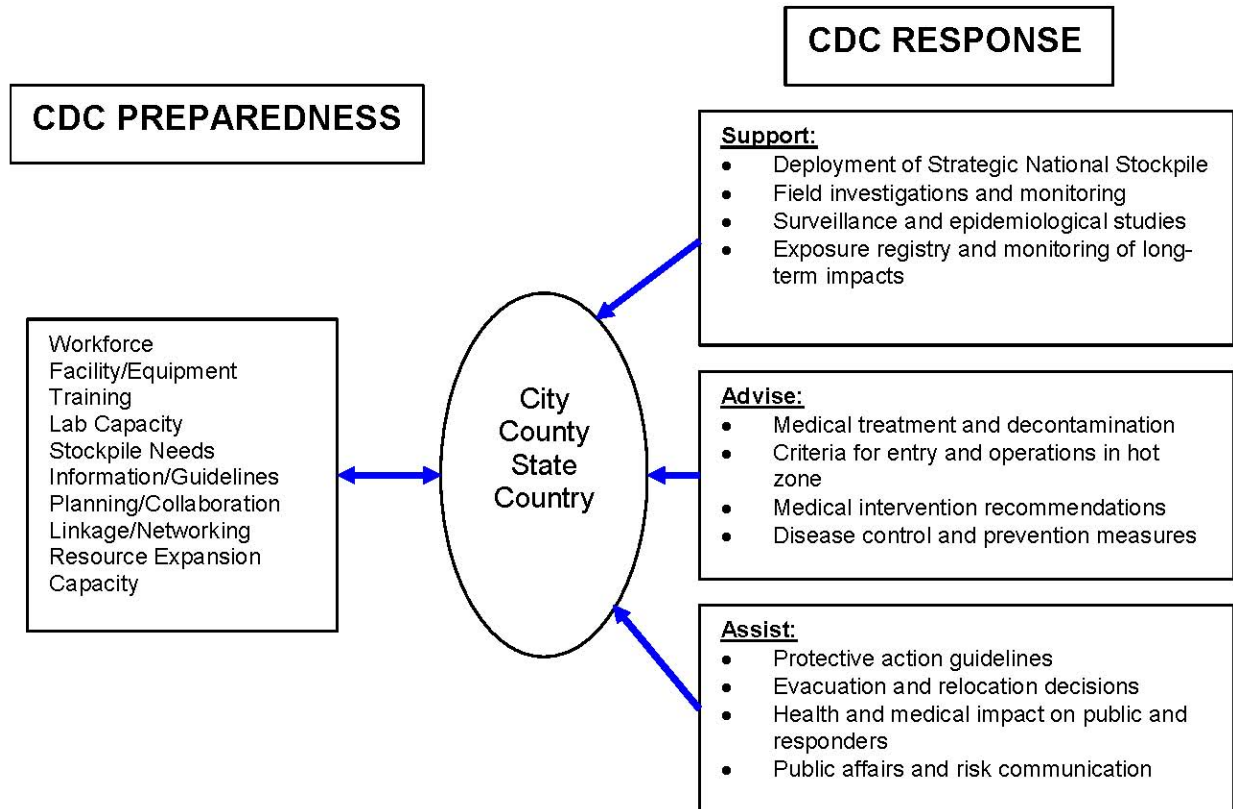
August 8, 2005

Page 2 of 3

## CDC's Roles in the Event of a Nuclear or Radiological Terrorist Attack

(continued from previous page)

reconstructions to determine the exact amount of radiation to which people were exposed. This registry would help CDC determine the necessary long-term medical follow-up for those who were affected by the incident.



*The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) protects people's health and safety by preventing and controlling diseases and injuries; enhances health decisions by providing credible information on critical health issues; and promotes healthy living through strong partnerships with local, national, and international organizations.*

For more information, visit [www.bt.cdc.gov/radiation](http://www.bt.cdc.gov/radiation),  
or call CDC at 800-CDC-INFO (English and Spanish) or 888-232-6348 (TTY).

August 8, 2005

Page 3 of 3