

## **Bio-Defense In The News...**

The following is taken from a press release issued by the British Medical Association and was reported by most major news outlets.

### **Take action now on biological weapons before it's too late, warns BMA**

Press release date: Monday, 25 Oct 2004 (BMA London)

A new report released today (25 October 2004) by the BMA paints a bleak picture of the global community's ability to cope with advances in biological and genetic weapons technology.

The report, [Biotechnology, Weapons and Humanity II](#), warns that the 'window of opportunity' to take action on this issue is shrinking fast. The BMA first published a report on this subject in 1999.

Dr Vivienne Nathanson, the BMA Head of Science and Ethics, said: "The situation today is arguably worse than it was when we published our last report five years ago. The very existence of international laws to protect us is being questioned, the anthrax attacks in the US in 2001 caused widespread panic and fear, and most worryingly of all, it's never been easier to develop biological weapons – all you have to do is look on the internet."

She added: "This report does not make comfortable reading but it is essential that governments take action on this issue now. If we wait too long it will be virtually impossible to defend ourselves."

The new BMA report analyses whether terrorist attacks like 9/11, anthrax attacks in the US in 2001 and the Moscow Theatre siege in 2002 have impacted on the development of biological weapons.

If the development of biological and genetic weapons is not curtailed, a future scenario could see the following:

- weapons that target specific ethnic groups
- imitation viruses, for example the re-creation of the 1918 'Spanish' flu
- crop control (viruses can be highly contagious and cause enormous damage to the agricultural industry and food production)
- bio-regulators (agents that could attack an individual's immune and nervous system – such as the fentanyl derivative that was used by Russian authorities to end the Moscow theatre hostage crisis in 2002)
- genetically engineered anthrax
- modified smallpox immune response (this would render current smallpox vaccines useless)
- synthetic polio virus

[Biotechnology, Weapons and Humanity II](#), warns of the overwhelming power of biological weapons. In 1999 it was only thought theoretically possible to develop weapons that could target specific ethnic groups. Five years on this is now approaching reality.

The report is on the BMA website at : [www.bma.org.uk/ap.nsf/Content/BioWeaponsII](http://www.bma.org.uk/ap.nsf/Content/BioWeaponsII)

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