

More labs received live anthrax from US military

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At least 51 labs in 17 states received shipments of live anthrax spores from military facilities, the Pentagon acknowledged Wednesday. The anthrax was also shipped to labs in three foreign countries, South Korea, Australia and Canada.

Some 31 people, both military and civilian, are taking the antibiotic Cipro as a precautionary measure after exposure to the anthrax, although none has yet tested positive for the deadly toxin.

The Pentagon added five states—Arizona, Florida, Illinois, North Carolina and Ohio, as well as the District of Columbia—to the 12 states where labs have been identified as receiving the live anthrax shipments from the Dugway Proving Ground and three other military germ warfare centers. The 12 states previously named are California, Delaware, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Virginia, and Wisconsin.

At the first formal Pentagon briefing on the subject, officials declined to name any of the 51 labs that received the deadly spores, except those run by the US government. Among those was the Pentagon's own internal police lab, run by the Pentagon Force Protection Agency. The military continues to claim that the public was never in any danger, despite the shipment of live anthrax through ordinary commercial distribution, mainly via Fedex.

Deputy Defense Secretary Robert Work said that anthrax was distributed as live spores rather than dead, as intended, because of the apparent failure of both systems in place to ensure the safety of shipments to research facilities.

Live anthrax is irradiated to kill the live spores, and the irradiated spores are then tested to make sure none are still alive and capable of reproduction. Both the irradiation and the testing had to fail in order to send

out live anthrax samples labeled as dead. “Why didn’t we kill the spores when we put them through what we considered to be a protocol that would?” he asked rhetorically.

A total of four batches of anthrax from Dugway have been identified by the Pentagon and CDC as having live spores when all the spores should have been dead. Another 400 batches of anthrax are being tested at four specialized labs, according to Frank Kendall, undersecretary of defense for acquisition, technology and logistics. As a result of this testing, the number of labs found to have received live anthrax samples could rise considerably beyond the 51 already identified.

Whatever the cause of the distribution of live anthrax samples—and Pentagon officials have been adamant that neither deliberate policy nor terrorism were involved, only human error of some kind—this incident sheds light on the vast scale of the germ warfare research being conducted in the United States.

Officials said that nine Defense Department labs conduct anthrax research, along with more than 300 commercial and academic labs. The four main germ warfare facilities that were the sources of the anthrax shipments are Dugway, in Utah, and three in Maryland: Fort Detrick, the Naval Medical Research Center, and Edgewood Chemical Biological Center.

All told, a staggering 1,500 US laboratories work on some form of biological weapons agent, fueled by \$9 billion in spending by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Pentagon since 2001, when anthrax mailings to congressional and media offices killed five people and infected another seventeen.

A lengthy report by *USA Today*, published last week under the headline “Inside America’s secret biolabs,” found that “hundreds of lab mistakes, safety violations and near-miss incidents have occurred in biological

laboratories coast to coast in recent years, putting scientists, their colleagues and sometimes even the public at risk.”

The account is worth careful reading. It demonstrates that the biggest danger of biological attack on the American population comes, not from terrorists like Al Qaeda or ISIS, but from the enormous germ warfare apparatus built up over many decades, with facilities located in some cases in the heart of major cities like New York City and Seattle.



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