

Hydroxocobalamin as a Cyanide Antidote: Prehospital Use for Smoke Inhalation and Suspected Cyanide Releases

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Introduction: Cyanide is a chemical warfare and toxic terrorism threat agent. Credible cyanide terrorism threats have been reported in Japan, the United States (Chicago, Illinois, eastern Texas, the 1991 World Trade Center bombing), New Zealand, the United Kingdom, Italy, the Middle East, and elsewhere. In addition, cyanide, like carbon monoxide, is a main toxicant contained in fire smoke.

A safe, efficacious antidote is required for use by prehospital responders. Of the antidotes available in the United States, sodium nitrite can cause life-threatening hypotension when administered too rapidly and can induce dangerous methemoglobinemia. Sodium thiosulfate alone acts too slowly. Hydroxocobalamin, a cyanide antidote with potential for use in the prehospital care setting, has been used in the prehospital setting for many years by the Brigade de Sapeurs-Pompiers de Paris (Paris Fire Brigade) in France.

Methods: Published studies involving hydroxocobalamin as a cyanide antidote were reviewed for evidence of safety and efficacy, and the experience of the Paris Fire Brigade Service de la Santé was reviewed.

Results: In *in vitro* and *in vivo* studies, hydroxocobalamin had efficacy similar to that of other available antidotes. In heavily smoking, normal, human volunteers, the administration of hydroxocobalamin was safe and efficacious in reducing low blood cyanide levels, although it was associated with a mild, transient elevation in blood pressure. Of 81 victims of smoke inhalation from enclosed-space fires in Paris, 18 of 29 who were in cardiac arrest recovered after hydroxocobalamin administration, and 12 of 15 with initial hypotension had clinical improvement. Adverse effects include transient dark red-brown discoloration of urine, skin, sclera, and mucous membranes from the color of the compound itself. Hypertension has not been observed in smoke-inhalation victims treated empirically for cyanide poisoning. Allergic reactions rarely have occurred with chronic low doses, but have not been reported following antidotal doses.

Discussion: Hydroxocobalamin has been used successfully in the prehospital setting. Even if the clinical diagnosis is incorrect, administering hydroxocobalamin is unlikely to result in harm. Hydroxocobalamin is a potentially useful product that could be administered safely when there is clinical suspicion of cyanide poisoning from either smoke inhalation or in a toxic terrorism mass-casualty situation.

Conclusion: Hydroxocobalamin is the antidote of choice in France and has been shown to reduce cyanide levels with no apparent safety issues *in vitro*, in smokers, and in cyanide-poisoned victims in the prehospital setting. The

experience of the Brigade de Sapeurs-Pompiers de Paris suggests that hydroxocobalamin should be considered for stocking and use by prehospital emergency medical services providers and hospital-based emergency physicians.

Keywords: antidotes; cyanide; hydroxocobalamin; Paris Fire Brigade; prehospital; sodium nitrate; sodium thiosulfate; toxins
Prehosp Disast Med 2005;20(2):s96

Emergency Department-Based Enhanced Bioterrorism Surveillance System: Experience in Korea

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Introduction: The threat of bioterrorism after 11 September 2001 in the US and the preparations for the 2002 Korea-Japan FIFA World Cup Game required an improved bioterrorism detection system. Emergency health professionals may be the first persons in contact with the victims of a bioterrorism attack, so an emergency department-based bioterrorism syndromic surveillance system was needed to allow for the early detection of a bioterrorist attack. The use of a routine bioterrorism syndromic, surveillance system began on 13 May 2002, and temporary enhanced syndromic surveillance systems were maintained for use for the Universiad Game in 2003 and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) meeting in 2004.

Methods: Data from Websites and computer servers were analyzed for the Universiad Game from 11 August to 14 September 2003, and for the ADB meeting from 6–31 May 2004. Data were gathered every day from 27 emergency departments, including the official Universiad Game Hospital for participants in the Universiad Game system and from eight emergency departments on Jeju Island for the ADB meeting, from Internet reports, faxes, and direct visitations. For the ADB surveillance system, emergency departments in designated hospitals corrected their electronic medical system and patient log books as directed by experts. Researchers analyzed the data daily and reported the results to the Korean Center for Disease Control. The odds ratio originating from syndrome to none ratio was used for aberration detection method, and the chi-square test was used for statistical analysis.

Results: An enhanced syndromic surveillance of the 2003 Universiad Game in Daegu, Korea, a specific Website for Universiad syndromic surveillance was prepared. The total number of patients included was 37,187, with 4,817 (12.7%) reported as syndromes. There were 31 episodes of aberration, but no clues were identified for bioterrorism attack or outbreak of infectious diseases.

When analyzing the enhanced syndrome surveillance of the 2004 ADB Meeting in Jeju Island, Korea, the reporting rate was perfect (100%). The total number of patients was 7,833, and 1,401 (17.9%) syndromes were reported. There were seven episodes of aberration and, also, no proof of biological terror or outbreak of infectious diseases.

Discussion: The enhanced syndrome surveillance system is a short-term, rapidly implemented, and event-specific system. It frequently includes active emergency department

data collection, focusing on syndromes that may represent infections with bioterrorist agents.

Conclusion: An emergency department-based, enhanced, bioterrorism, syndrome-surveillance system can be maintained effectively for a short-term period. Additional data sources and accumulation of long-term baseline data are necessary for further system development. The guidelines for early aberration reporting and evaluation of syndrome surveillance systems also requires more research.

Keywords: bioterrorism; emergency department; enhanced; Korea; surveillance; system

Prehosp Disast Med 2005;20(2):s96-s97

Development of a Comprehensive Bioterrorism Information System in Korea

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Introduction: A bioterrorism surveillance system was developed in Korea for the 2002 Korea-Japan FIFA World Cup Games and has been maintained since 13 May 2002 and is being upgraded by a new system. The new system was based on the Internet and is comprised of three parts: (1) emergency department; (2) infection specialist; and (3) laboratory. The parts were separated because the parts were required for the development of a comprehensive bioterrorism surveillance and information system.

Methods: The new system required six months for development, beginning in May 2004. A unified web server and database server were developed and included a firewall. One portal site was developed through which all of the information about bioterrorism would pass. In the emergency department, a syndromic surveillance system was initiated, in which the routine and temporary enhanced surveillance systems were separated. Adding to the three parts previously described, a real-time, automatic, statistical analysis system was developed for the generation of reports, automatic text messaging from the mobile phones of essential personnel, and an automatic information gathering system from the related web sites. The new comprehensive system was implemented on 15 November 2004, and every aspect of this system was tested.

Results: The three parts previously described functioned well through the portal site. The real-time automatic statistical analysis system actually was performed in real-time and matched with those obtained from conventional statistical results. The automatic text message sending system to the mobile phones also functioned well, and it was confirmed that the members of designated hospitals received the messages. The information-gathering system from the related websites was functioning, but the amount of the contents required more work.

Conclusions: A comprehensive bioterrorism surveillance and information system was developed and the early maintenance was confirmed. Further study is needed.

Keywords: assessment; bioterrorism information system; comprehensive; development; Korea

Prehosp Disast Med 2005;20(2):s97

Terror Australis Redux: Revisiting Australian Emergency Department Preparedness for Terrorism

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In 2003, the results of a survey examining Australian emergency department preparedness for mass-casualty incidents with contaminated casualties was presented at the 13th World Congress on Disaster and Emergency Medicine in Melbourne, Australia. At the time, many politicians in Australia considered the country to be relatively immune to the threat of terrorism from abroad.

Since then, the position of Australia on the world stage has changed. Its involvement in wars in Afghanistan and Iraq has increased its profile as a target for terrorism substantially. Has this change resulted in substantive improvements in levels of preparedness in Australian emergency departments?

A follow-up survey was sent to all emergency department directors in Australia in early 2004, with the intention of comparing the initial survey results with the current opinions and present-day, perceived levels of preparedness. The second survey collected greater detail and new information, as well as documenting the change over time since the first survey. More than 85% (n = 76) of departmental directors replied, a reflection of the ongoing level of local interest in the topic.

Details reviewed included opinions regarding the risks and the potential consequences of terrorist attacks with both conventional and weapons of mass destruction (WMD) approaches. The frequency of practice, levels of training, and amount of pharmaceuticals available and personal protective equipment present all were surveyed in detail. Policy regarding the entry of hospital staff into potential "hot zones" also was surveyed.

The second Terror Australis survey represents the most comprehensive independent analysis of hospital preparation for terrorism in any single developed country. It raises important questions regarding funding, training, and physician attitudes, all of which will need to be addressed before an event, if an effective response is to be mounted.

Keywords: Australia; mass-casualty incident; survey; Terror Australis; terrorism; update

Prehosp Disast Med 2005;20(2):s97

Preparations for Possible Bioterrorism Attack

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"See where the green grass grows again, and a blade of grass is for each of you."

The Heavy Rucksack by Giulio Bedeschi

The 20th century can be considered the era of developments in chemical weapons and weapons of mass destruction. Whereas in the 4th century, it was common practice to use poisoned arrows dipped in decomposing bodies, today that might seem a little old-fashioned. Between 1960