

Report Praises Current Measures in U.S. Biological Defense

In a May report, the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) released a report assessing the U.S. government's preparedness for biological threat agents, including biological weapons. GAO-14-442 is the result of a mandate to review the Department of Defense's efforts to research and develop medical countermeasures against prioritized biological threat agents.

Included in the report are evaluations of DoD's progress in researching, developing, and making available medical countermeasures against biological threat agents. The report also describes DoD's internal coordination to allocate resources to medical countermeasures against biological threat agents, and evaluates DoD's coordination with the Departments of Health and Human Services (HHS) and Homeland Security (DHS) to research and develop medical countermeasures against biological threat agents.

During their evaluation, GAO found that DoD's coordination with HHS and DHS align with the best practices to facilitate collaboration across agency boundaries. GAO also determined that the joint research campus shared by DoD, HHS, and DHS – the National Interagency Biodefense Campus at Fort Detrick, Maryland – has a governance structure that allows the agencies to leverage available resources and facilitate scientific exchange. There are also interagency agreements and established processes that aid in communication between the agencies and help identify threats and risks.

While conducting their review, GAO found that DoD does not use its established process for annually updating its list of threat priorities, and suggested that DoD implement a process to update its list of biological threats according to its current policies. DoD concurred and identified steps to address the recommendation. **IAJ**