



Statement of Lowell Weicker, Former U.S. Senator and Governor of CT
Ready or Not? Protecting the Public's Health in the Age of Bioterrorism
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The tragedies of September 11 and the anthrax attacks shook the nation – and highlighted in the most dramatic way possible that our country was not ready to respond to large-scale health crises.

Even before the threats of bio- and chemical terrorism, the nation's state and local health agencies were already severely stretched too thin trying to manage everything from West Nile virus to containing a the flu outbreak -- with too few resources.

Congress responded to the urgent need by providing nearly \$2 billion to fill the critical gaps in our health defenses. This has created the impression that America's long-neglected public health system was undergoing rapid, radical improvements. However, there was no system of accountability in place to measure what impact these funds were having.

So, Trust for America's Health conducted this state-by-state study to find out whether, after 2 years and nearly \$2 billion of federal bioterror money, are we ready or not for another attack – or other major health emergency.

The short answer is “Not.”

This study shows that states are only modestly better prepared to respond to health emergencies than they were prior to 9/11. The findings are unsettling. We found that some good progress has been made to develop initial response plans, to expand the health emergency communications alert network and to make some upgrades to laboratories (which diagnose and provide the answers on how to control emergencies from getting worse).

However, we still have a very long way to go...The preparedness efforts have been hurt by the state budget crises, bureaucratic red tape, a workforce crisis, and interagency wrangling.

Homeland security requires protecting the health and safety of our communities by being prepared for the next big emergency. This report shows that we are falling short of that responsibility. We've had a really loud wake up call. It's time for us to respond with a much better answer -- a real and sustained commitment to achieving a battle-ready public health defense for the nation.

