DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES

Office of the Secretary

Washington, D.C. 20201

JUL 26 2002

TO: State and Local Health Officials

FROM: Jerome M. Hauer, Acting Assistant Secretary for Public Health Emergency Preparedness

SUBJECT: Handheld Systems for the Detection of Anthrax and Other Biological Agents

Please find attached a statement recommending against the use of handheld systems for the detection of anthrax and other biological agents. This statement is based upon the results of a study of commercially available assays conducted by the FBI and the CDC. The study found that the assays gave inconsistent and sometimes inaccurate results; they required anywhere from 100,000 to 100,000,000 spores to generate a positive response, thereby creating the possibility of false negatives, and there were a number of chemicals that resulted in false positives.

Based on these findings, HHS is recommending that the first responder community not purchase these handheld assays. HHS requests your assistance in informing the first responder community of the risks inherent in using these assays. Please distribute the attached to your constituency and encourage them to discuss these recommendations with their first responder communities, and reinforce the availability of more reliable laboratory services through the public health laboratory system. Thank you for your assistance in this matter.

Attachment