

RAND NEW STUDY

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THE GLOBAL THREAT OF NEW AND REEMERGING INFECTIOUS DISEASES

RAND has issued a new report that focuses on the increasing transnational threat of infectious disease.

Although the research was completed before the recent threat of SARS, the report examines two case studies (HIV/AIDS in Africa and infectious disease in the U.S.) that illustrate similar threats or potential threats to stability and security.

Deaths from infectious illnesses average about 170,000 per year in the United States, but the scope of the situation is much larger when stigmatization, productivity losses, and other psychological and economic costs are taken into account.

The spread of disease goes beyond individual exposure: it can weaken public confidence in government's ability to respond, have an adverse economic impact, undermine a state's social order and pose a strategic threat through bioterrorism.

Chances of coming in contact with new or more virulent organisms may increase as citizens: continue to travel and threats cross international borders, import food and goods globally, engage in promiscuous sex, use illegal intravenous drugs, encroach on new habitats and utilize donated blood.

In 2002 the public health and medical infrastructure are being strengthened, but remain variable while exposure to emerging and reemerging pathogens has grown.

The report will be of interest to U.S. and international policymakers inside and outside government who are developing strategies to cope with the increasing threat posed by pathogens.

The federal government should consider playing a more concerted role in providing resources and instituting unified standards for the common defense against the microbial threat.

Several specific actions could be initiated including:

- coordination between public health authorities at all levels of government as well as integration of the private sector;
- a large-scale education and information campaign;
- incentivizing the growth of the supply of healthcare workers;
- and development of appropriate emergency plans by hospitals and emergency health facilities.