

CDC outlines five incidents in which deadly pathogens were mishandled

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Dangerous germs, including anthrax, botulism and a strain of bird flu, were improperly sent among government laboratories in five incidents during the last decade, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which said it had closed two labs and had imposed a moratorium on shipping deadly pathogens.

The announcement of the previously undisclosed incidents comes days after the CDC said scientists had discovered six vials of the smallpox virus in an unused storage room at the National Institutes of Health campus in Bethesda, Md.

No member of the public nor any of the workers in the government laboratories were affected by the five incidents, according to Benjamin N. Haynes, senior press officer for the CDC's infectious disease team.

In a conference call with reporters, CDC director Tom Frieden said he was angry about the lapses.

"These events should never have happened," Frieden told reporters. The American people "may be wondering whether we're doing what we need to do to keep them safe and to keep our workers safe.

"I'm disappointed, and frankly I'm angry about it."

The Atlanta-based CDC is one of the government's top health and research agencies. It handles some of the most advanced work in

laboratories that require stringent precautions in the handling of killer pathogens. Friday's report outlines problems going back to 2006.

Last month, the agency announced there had been a problem at its main Bioterrorism Rapid Response and Advanced Technology anthrax lab at the Roybal Campus in Atlanta and dozens of workers could have been exposed. The agency investigated, and its report examining that incident and outlining four others was released Friday.

According to the report, the main problems in June included in the use of unapproved sterilization techniques during the transfer of some samples. Workers failed to ensure that the anthrax was inactive before transfer and failed to follow standard operating procedures to inactivate the virus.

That Roybal Campus lab has been closed since June 16, the CDC said, and the facility will remain shuttered until corrective actions are taken. Those include "appropriate personnel actions" against those involved in the incident and a full review on how the agents are shipped around the country. Major government research facilities in Atlanta and Colorado are among those affected by the moratorium on shipping.

A second lab was closed after a sample of flu virus was contaminated by a deadly strain of H5N1 [bird flu](#). The contaminated sample was sent from an Atlanta CDC lab to another government lab in Georgia.

The mistaken shipment took place on March 13, but was not discovered for weeks. It was reported to top officials this week and was included in the current report. There were no apparent safety problems after the shipment, the CDC said, but noted "unacceptable delays in reporting of the inadvertent shipment."

The report also outlined three other questionable shipping incidents,

including two in 2006. One 2006 incident involved the shipment of anthrax DNA that was thought to be inactive, but turned out to be viable. The other incident that year involved the botulism bacteria, which was shipped live from a CDC lab to an undisclosed facility. Botulism generally produces a nerve toxin that can cause muscle weakness and can kill if it spread to the respiratory system.

The fifth incident in 2009 involved the shipment of a strain of Brucella, which can cause a contagious bacterial infection called brucellosis. The shipment was incorrectly thought at the time to be a vaccine, the report said.

The release of the CDC report comes days after government officials discovered vials of smallpox that appear to date from the 1950s. The vials were flown the CDC from Maryland for testing.

Frieden said that two of six vials have shown growth, so they seem to be viable, and that it could take weeks to determine the status of the other vials. All will be destroyed, he said.

The vials, dated Feb. 10, 1954, were discovered as Food and Drug Administration scientists prepared to move their lab from the NIH campus to the FDA's main facility.

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