

The Kims' Little Shop of Horrors

When it comes to threats from North Korea, most attention focuses on nuclear arms. A recent RAND study, however, notes that the communist Kim dynasty—Kim Il Sung, Kim Jong Il, and Kim Jong Eun—has also pushed for a horrific array of biological weapons. The exact nature of this program

is murky, but the table here gives a sense of its likely dimensions. The worries include malignant anthrax, cholera, bubonic plague, and even smallpox. If weaponized and employed, says the author, these agents would pose “a fearsome threat” to South Korea and even the United States.

Potential North Korean Biological Agents

BW Agent	Type of Agent	Untreated Lethality	Korean Cases		U.S. Cases 2011
			2010	2011	
Anthrax	Bacteria	High	0	0	1
Botulinum	Toxin	High	0	1	153
Brucellosis	Bacteria	<5%	31	19	79
Cholera	Bacteria	50+%	8	3	40
Dengue fever	Virus	1%	125	72	3
Diphtheria	Bacteria	5–10%	0	0	?
Dysentery	Bacteria	Low	?	?	?
E. coli	Bacteria	3-5%	56	71	2,575
Hemorrhagic fever (HFRS)	Virus	5–15%	473	370	23
Hepatitis	Virus	Low	?	7,247	4,301
Japan. Encep.	Virus	≤60%	26	3	?
Malaria	Parasite	Low	1,772	838	1,724
Pertussis	Bacteria	Low	27	97	18,719
Pnm. plague	Bacteria	High	0	0	3
Q Fever	Bacteria	Low	13	8	134
Smallpox	Virus	20–40%	0	0	0
Tuberculosis	Bacteria	High	36,305	39,557	10,528
Tularemia	Bacteria	Moderate	0	0	166
Typhoid fever	Bacteria	Moderate	133	148	390
Typhus	Rickettsia	Moderate	54	23	?
Yellow fever	Virus	Moderate	0	0	0

Listing of South Korean and US cases is for reference and comparison only and does not signify cases of actual North Korean employment of weapons.

Source: “The Challenge of North Korean Biological Weapons,” by Bruce W. Bennett, testimony before the House Armed Services subcommittee on intelligence, emerging threats, and capabilities, Oct. 11, 2013; published by RAND Corp., Santa Monica, Calif., 2013. Based principally on data from the Korea Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; and US Forces Korea. Find the report on the RAND website at <http://www.rand.org/pubs/testimonies/CT401.html>.