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**JOINT LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE HEARS REPORT
ON FIGHTING SPREAD OF INFECTIOUS DISEASES**

JEFFERSON CITY -- At a joint legislative committee meeting Monday, experts told lawmakers that Missouri is not fully prepared for an infectious disease outbreak. Representatives from the Centers for the Study of Bioterrorism and Emerging Infections at St. Louis University spoke at a meeting of the Joint Committee on Terrorism, Bioterrorism and Homeland Security.

“It’s sobering to consider that our medical community can take all of the usual precautions and it’s still not enough,” said Sen. John Griesheimer, chairman of the joint committee. “We have a long way to go to fight the spread of infectious disease.”

In a terrorist’s hands, biological agents such as the smallpox virus, SARS or anthrax pose as great a threat to public safety as nuclear weapons, the committee was told.

“Unfortunately, what we are quickly learning is that our emergency healthcare professionals are not fully trained to meet the new challenges that have arisen since 9/11,” Griesheimer said. “These highly-trained individuals simply have not received the right training to protect themselves or their patients.”

According to Gene Carroll, the technical director for the Centers for the Study of Bioterrorism and Emerging Infections, paramedics often don’t have proper training to handle emerging health threats.

In a demonstration film shown to lawmakers, paramedics were called to a fictitious scene where a victim had been infected with a highly contagious disease.

Despite taking all the current precautions, the paramedics transferred germs from the infected person to their clothes, equipment and all over the ambulance.

Carroll told the committee that germs that can live for a prolonged period of time outside of the body now spread the most dangerous diseases.

“We have a long way to go to fight the spread of infectious diseases,” said Carroll.

Many of the protective procedures are already in place in emergency rooms, but are not used in emergency vehicles.

The Centers for the Study of Bioterrorism and Emerging Infections is looking for funding to create a training kit for emergency workers that could be used nationwide. The estimated cost for the project would be \$250,000.

In other business, Griesheimer informed the committee that House Budget Chairman Carl Bearden has included language in one of the budget bills that would give provide the Joint Committee Joint Committee on Terrorism, Bioterrorism and Homeland Security with input on how Missouri spends the homeland security funds the state has received from the federal government.

For additional information, contact Sen. John Griesheimer at (573) 751-3678.