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2 **ET CETERA** THE BATTALION
 Friday • May 1, 1998

Scientists find target for anthrax toxin

WASHINGTON (AP) — In an important step toward finding drugs to protect against some biological weapons, researchers have discovered how anthrax toxin destroys cells and rapidly causes death.

Now that science knows the target for the anthrax toxin, researchers should be able to find a drug that will block its action, said Dr. George F. Vande Woude, a National Cancer Institute researcher and co-author of a study to be published in the journal Science.

"An inhibitor drug would make anthrax as a weapon as useful as a water pistol," said Vande Woude.

Experts consider anthrax weapons a major threat to both military personnel and civilians. Bioterrorism weapons using anthrax or other bacteria are easier to make and distribute than nuclear weapons. Anthrax bombs are a major concern of United Nations weapons inspectors working in Iraq.

Attorney General Janet Reno and FBI Director Louis J. Freeh warned Congress last week that U.S. civilian targets are vulnerable to biological terrorism.

Some in Congress have said classified studies suggest such an attack on civilians could occur within a decade.

The military is inoculating all of its troops against anthrax, using a vaccine that would prevent infection from the disease.

However, the vaccine is not 100 percent effective and most civilians do not receive these shots.

Anthrax is a rapid and highly effective killer. When it infects, the bacteria produces a toxin, or poison, that attacks cells.

"The only treatment now for anthrax is to give massive, massive amounts of antibiotics," said Nicholas S. Duesbery of NCI.

"You have to give it almost immediately after exposure. If you give it 24 hours later, it is too late. Your patient is dead."

Anthrax toxin consists of three proteins, and early research showed that one of the proteins, called Lethal Factor, or LF, was the major cause of cell death.

But what science didn't know until now is how LF actually killed the cells.

Vande Woude, Duesbery and their colleagues found that LF disrupts a signaling system in cells called the MAP-Kinase-Kinase (MAP-K-K) pathway.

When this system is blocked, said Duesbery, a cell "is cut off from the world."

Its metabolism shuts down and it can no longer divide.

The toxin also causes the massive release of an inflammation protein and destruction of immune system cells called macrophages.

The result, said Duesbery, is rapid shock and death.

In laboratory experiments, he said, "rats are quite dead within just 40 minutes" when injected with anthrax toxin.

Now that researchers know the target of Lethal Factor, said Duesbery, "this gives us the first clues of what we need to develop an anti-toxin. We can look at the protein structure of the target and come up with (a protein molecule) that will block Lethal Factor from chopping up its target."

Col. Arthur M. Friedlander, an Army anthrax researcher, said the discovery is significant in understanding how anthrax kills, but he cautioned that it may take more than a single anti-toxin to disarm the disease.

"It is not just that toxin that kills in this disease," he said. "But this offers a new approach that may lead to other inhibitors that would work."

Meringue!



Daniel Ramirez, a junior biology major, and Kim Ostiguen dance outside of the MSC Thursday to advertise Latino Jam '98.

WHAT'S UP

Friday

Alpha Phi Omega: Meet to go visit Crestview Retirement Home at 6:30 p.m. at Crestview.

Horsemen's Association: There will be a campout for all members all day at Huntsville State Park. Call Lainie at 696-3381 for details.

MSC Town Hall-Coffeehouse: Free food and live music will be held at 7 p.m. at Research Park or Rumours if inclement weather occurs.

National Day of Prayer, Central Texas Division: Everyone is welcome to join thousands of Americans across the country in lifting our country and leaders up in prayer on Thursday, May 7. We will meet at 12 p.m. at the College Station Town Hall flagpole next to Chili's on Texas Ave. Call Steve at 693-0289 for details.

Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers (SHPE): The first annual recognition banquet will be held in MSC 230/231 at 7 p.m.. Call Walter Luizaga at 847-8878 for details.

Saturday

Horseman's Association: There will be a campout for all members all day at Huntsville State Park. Call Lainie at 696-3381 for details.

What's Up is a Battalion service that lets non-profit student and faculty events and activities. Items should be submitted no later than three days in advance of the desired date. Application deadlines and notices of not events and will not be run in What's Up. If you have any questions, please call the newsroom at 845-3313.

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