

MILITARY KNEW OF VACCINE'S HAZARDS 1998 MEMO CONTRADICTS ARMY'S
ASSURANCES
OF ANTHRAX SHOTS' SAFETY
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The Department of the Army wrote a memorandum on Sept. 3, 1998, telling the military's sole supplier of anthrax, the Michigan Biologic Products Institute, that it would hold the firm harmless from potential legal action if soldiers became sick after taking the vaccine. A day earlier, the company announced it was being sold to BioPort Corp. The sequence of the notice and the sale and BioPort's name were incorrect in a story on Page 1 Wednesday.

The secretary of the U.S. Army conceded in a September 1998 memo that the anthrax vaccine eventually to be administered to 2.4 million service people could cause adverse reactions and might not even protect some against anthrax attacks.

The acknowledgements turned up in a memo being used by two former Connecticut Air National Guard pilots who refused to take the vaccination and quit the guard. They are planning a class action lawsuit in federal court hoping to block the vaccinations and reinstate service people who have been discharged.

The memorandum, unearthed by a lieutenant colonel sympathetic to soldiers who oppose the vaccination, was written by Army Secretary Louis Caldera to the Michigan-based manufacturer of the anthrax vaccine.

Caldera said in the memo that adverse reactions of service people being inoculated could include "anaphylaxis," a potentially serious respiratory or fainting problem, "as well as unforeseen reactions."

As a result of "the unusually hazardous risks associated with the potential for adverse reactions in some recipients" and the fact that the vaccine may not protect some against anthrax attacks, Caldera said, the Army would take the responsibility for "indemnifying" the product.

The memo conflicts with Defense Department claims that the vaccine is safe. Hundreds of service people have declined to take the vaccination, and face disciplinary action, discharge or both. Some have resigned.

Maj. Russell Dingle, 42, of East Hartford, and Capt. Thomas L. Rempfer, 33, of Suffield, are planning a complaint to U.S. District Court under a section of military law prohibiting abuse of those in the military. They were among eight veteran combat pilots from the Connecticut Air National Guard -- almost a quarter of the 103rd Fighter Wing -- who resigned in January to protest use of the vaccine.

Tuesday, in a one-page written response, Caldera did not answer questions he himself raised in the 1998 memo.

He said the Army protected the manufacturer from lawsuits "in order to ensure a continuous supply of anthrax vaccine for soldiers at the lowest possible cost to taxpayers." If the company was exposed to the risk of lawsuits, Caldera said, it might have to stop production.

Caldera also did not address his memo's assertion that the vaccine may not protect some against anthrax attacks. A Defense Department spokeswoman said the memo only meant that some enemies of the United States may have strains of anthrax for which the U.S. vaccine is ineffective.

The vaccine, which requires six inoculations in 18 months, is supposed to combat deadly anthrax airborne spores that could be spread using aerosol devices.

Since March 1998, U.S. service people have been the only major military force in the world required to take the vaccine, which some soldiers say has made them sick. So far, about 1 million service people have been inoculated; the vaccination program is expected to cost \$130 million.

Although they quit the guard, Dingle and Rempfer are still in the Air Force Reserve, and have done recruiting for the U.S. Air Force Academy.

"I want to continue to serve my country," Rempfer said, "and guess what? I want to be honest and moral and serve my country just like Air Force cadets are taught to do, and just like I am doing now {with this complaint}."

Rempfer questioned the vaccine's safety, and said pilots forced to resign rather than take it should be reinstated.

Both Dingle and Rempfer, saying they were state employees in the Connecticut Air National Guard when the vaccine was being administered, unsuccessfully complained to the state auditors of public accounts. In his complaint, Dingle said if the state did not prevent the use of the anthrax vaccine, it would be responsible for the medical costs of guardsmen who became sick.

The state auditors, Robert G. Jaekle and Kevin P. Johnston, said last month that Attorney General Richard Blumenthal ruled the matter belonged in the hands of federal authorities.

Neither the auditors nor Blumenthal was given a copy of the Army memo mentioning the hazards of the vaccine. Rempfer said he just came into possession of the document.

The memo comes to light on the eve of a federal hearing examining the safety of the inoculation program. U.S. Rep. Christopher Shays, R-4th District, co-chairman of the House Government Reform and Oversight subcommittee on national security, is conducting the hearing.

Beginning today, Shays' committee is expected to review the manufacturing history of the vaccine, including federal inspections that found deficiencies in the way Michigan Biologic Products Institute produced the vaccine.

MBPI, the sole manufacturer of the vaccine, was sold to another company, Biport, in September 1998, just before the Army informed the company it would take on the responsibility of holding the company harmless from potential legal action if soldiers became sick after taking the vaccine.

The Defense Department says the anthrax vaccination can cause short-term adverse reactions in some people, including muscle and joint pains, headaches, rashes, fatigue, nausea, diarrhea, chills and fever.

The most recent Defense Department reports show only 14 reactions serious enough that the service people had to be off work. With 102 total reactions reported, this means only .01 percent of the shots caused an adverse reaction, Dr. Sue Bailey, assistant secretary of defense for health affairs, said this month.

But Dr. Meryl Nass, a Maine doctor who has studied the data on adverse reactions, said Tuesday the Defense Department was "not reporting them accurately."

She said in studies about 20 percent of those taking the vaccine are suffering from more than swelling in their arms, and about 30 percent have arm swelling or other problems in the area of the shot.

Chronic symptoms can include fatigue, dizziness, joint and muscle pain, headaches, memory loss, sleep disorder, sensory nerve pain, intermittent abdominal pain, intermittent diarrhea, chest pains and recurring rashes.

Apparent problems with the use of the vaccine first began surfacing among some of the estimated 150,000 Persian Gulf War veterans inoculated before that war. After the war, many complained of long-range adverse symptoms, but few could pinpoint whether the cause may have been a vaccine or one of many other hazardous wartime exposures.