

MILITARY QUERIED ABOUT ANTHRAX VACCINE
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Pentagon officials came under sharp questioning Wednesday about plans to inoculate 2.4 million members of the armed forces against anthrax.

"Why this vaccine?" Rep. Christopher Shays, R-4th District, asked at a hearing of the House Government Reform and Oversight subcommittee on national security.

Up to 200 service members have refused to take the vaccine. The Pentagon has said that 220,000 have been vaccinated.

"Anthrax is the primary biological warfare threat faced by U.S. forces," Sue Bailey, assistance defense secretary for health affairs, told the panel. She said the anthrax vaccine was tested by the Food and Drug Administration and found safe, a determination confirmed by an independent review.

"There have been no long-term side effects reported with the FDA- licensed anthrax vaccine," which has been in use since 1970, she said.

Shays said that there was a lack of trust in the Pentagon program and that the military's efforts to counter concerns "seem heavy- handed and one-sided, glossing over legitimate concerns about the safety and efficacy of the vaccine, minimizing adverse reaction reports, and blaming the Internet for fanning dissent."

Committee members also heard from two members of the Connecticut Air National Guard who have refused to take the vaccine.

"We can do better than an outdated, marginally effective vaccine against only one of many potential biological pathogens," said Capt. Thomas Rempfer, 33, a pilot who quit the guard after completing a report on the anthrax vaccine.

Capt. Russell Dingle, 42, served with Rempfer and is also quitting. He raised questions about the safety of the vaccine and the Pentagon's policy of forcing it on all enlisted men and women.