

IDF to begin giving its medics chemical weapons antidote

Amid growing concern over Syrian nerve gas, the army acquires tens of thousands of doses of diazepam

By MITCH GINSBURG | December 11, 2012, 2:56 pm |

The IDF has acquired tens of thousands of doses of a drug used to combat nerve agent attacks. The Times of Israel's Daily Edition by email and never miss our top stories. Sign up for our magazine.

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The drug, diazepam, is an anti-convulsant, halting seizures caused by nerve agents such as VX and sarin. Until now, the IDF supplied all medics with atropine, a drug that counters attacks on the respiratory system, but diazepam, which protects the central nervous system, was available only in intravenous form and was distributed only to rear echelon battalion medical centers.

"Now the medics receive auto injectors, enabling treatment half an hour to an hour earlier than before, and also enabling treatment to 10 times more people," the head of nonconventional warfare medicine in the IDF's medical corps, Lt. Col. Dr. Micah Ksirer, told this week Bamahane.

The report comes amid widespread international concern regarding the stockpiles of chemical weapons belonging to the teetering government in Syria.

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said last week that "an increasingly desperate Assad regime" could either try to use chemical weapons against its own people or "lose control of them to one of the many groups that are now operating within Syria."

The latter option, particularly the proliferation of the weapons to Hezbollah, is "a clear casus belli" for Israel, according to Foreign Minister Avigdor Liberman.

Key Israeli officials, largely mum on the threat of internal use, have expressed doubt that Assad would use the weapons against Israel. "We see no sign that this weaponry is being pointed at us," Moshe Ya'alon, minister of strategic affairs and a former IDF chief of staff, told Army Radio earlier this week. "Syria has been armed for the last decades with chemical missiles and weapons, but our deterrent factor is stable and the proof is that they haven't used them against us yet."

Diazepam and atropine are carried by all US combat troops operating in areas where there is a reasonable threat from chemical weapons. Each soldier carries a kit and is expected to self-administer the drugs or, in the case of diazepam, to administer it to a friend in need.

“Shortening the duration [prior to] treatment can save the injured from brain damage and death,” said Ksirer.

IDF medics will begin receiving treatment on how and when to administer the new drug as part of their intensive 13-week combat medic course.

The IDF Spokesperson’s Office added that the army “constantly reevaluates the medical gear necessary to provide medical care for soldiers in the battlefield. Military medics must be prepared for every eventuality; the gear that they carry reflects this principle.”

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