

APR 24 1997



WHITEHEAD INSTITUTE

April 22, 1997

Dr. Matthew Meselson  
Harvard University  
Department of Molecular and Cellular Biology  
7 Divinity Avenue  
Cambridge, MA 02138

Dear Dr. Meselson:

I am writing to explore your availability to speak on Friday, May 30, at 4:30 pm, during a national press seminar on Infectious Diseases sponsored by the Whitehead Institute for Biomedical Research and Massachusetts General Hospital.

Eve Nichols mentioned that you gave a popular lecture on biological warfare at a public lecture series at the Whitehead Institute a few years ago, and we would be thrilled to have you back this year to end our press seminar, titled "Modern Plagues: Emerging and Re-Emerging Diseases."

As the enclosed program details, the press seminar has attracted many of today's top infectious disease researchers as speakers. We expect an equally impressive audience of reporters and science writers from newspapers and journals such as *The New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *The Boston Globe*, and *Science*. The press seminar has a dual purpose: to educate reporters and provide them new ideas and resources for their stories. Last year the Whitehead Institute co-sponsored a similar seminar on Cancer Genetics with Dana-Farber Cancer Institute, with much success.

Part of our success had to do with the stimulating program we put together, an event featuring the latest topics by top-notch people in the field. Our goal is to do the same this year with help from three scientific advisors who will also speak at the seminar—Dr. Steve Calderwood, Chief of Infectious Diseases at MGH; Dr. Arnold Weinberg, Medical Director, MIT, and an Infectious Diseases expert; and Dr. Rick Young, Whitehead Member and Professor of Biology, MIT.

We have confirmed most of the speakers in the program, including Drs. David Ho, David Baltimore, Jonathan Mann, Mary Wilson, and several others. We would be honored to add your name to the list.

We look forward to hearing from you and sincerely hope that you can participate.

Sincerely,

Seema Kumar  
Associate Director of Public Affairs

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Abstract for talk at a Seminar on "Modern Plagues" by Matthew Meselson, Thomas Dudley Cabot Professor of the Natural Sciences, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA at Massachusetts General Hospital, 4:30 PM, Friday May 30, 1997

Contrary to a common view, the experience of those who have attempted it suggests that the production of biological weapons of mass destructive capability is not a simple matter. Nevertheless, once successfully developed, produced and tested, weapons based on infectious aerosols could pose an immense threat for mass killing of unprotected people and for the incitement of terror. Military personnel of advanced states can in principle be provided with effective protection. But, although improvements should and are being sought, the protection of civil populations is likely to remain minimal. In view of this and because, once initiated, the acquisition of biological weapons and other hostile exploitations of biotechnology may proliferate uncontrollably, primary emphasis must be placed on reducing to a minimum the likelihood that any state or other entity will seek such weapons in the first place. A number of ongoing efforts to maintain and intensify the constraints against acquisition of biological weapons will be described.