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‘Contagion’ Puts a Focus on Infectious Diseases

To the Editor:

The comments of the virus hunter W. Ian Lipkin ([“The Real Threat of ‘Contagion.’ ”](#) Op-Ed, Sept. 12) concerning the reality of the movie “Contagion” are highly poignant given the emergence of new diseases due to viruses, bacteria, fungi and/or parasites each year. We are vulnerable, but there are new molecular tools available to help us diagnose infections and monitor transmission of new disease-causing agents.

An important consequence of the anthrax attacks in 2001 and the SARS (severe acute respiratory syndrome) epidemic in 2002-4 was the realization that the national laboratory infrastructure was woefully inadequate to handle these agents. In response, the National Institutes of Health invested more than half a billion dollars to create both national and regional biocontainment laboratories where emerging pathogens can be studied safely.

This national laboratory infrastructure is critical to domestic and global health security. Yet beyond the initial capital investment, there is no money available from the federal government to operate most of these complex facilities.

As a nation, we invest in technology. But we need to be sure that the infrastructure to work on threat agents is maintained and strengthened to ensure that we are prepared to handle the next major infectious challenge.

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