



Anthrax – Fact Sheet

Compiled from information from Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and distributed by Jefferson County Department of Health and Environment.

What Is Anthrax?

Anthrax is a serious disease caused by *Bacillus anthracis*, a bacterium that forms spores. A bacterium is a very small organism made up of one cell. Many bacteria can cause disease. A spore is a cell that is dormant (asleep) but may come to life with the right conditions. Anthrax most commonly occurs in hoofed mammals such as antelope, sheep, goats and cattle. Anthrax can also infect humans. There are three kinds of anthrax, all of which are treatable with antibiotics: skin (cutaneous), lungs (inhalation), digestive (gastrointestinal).

Is Anthrax Contagious?

Direct person-to-person spread of anthrax is extremely unlikely, and anthrax is not contagious.

Therefore, there is no need to quarantine individuals suspected of being exposed to anthrax or to immunize or treat contacts of persons ill with anthrax, such as household contacts, friends, or coworkers, unless they were also exposed to the same source of infection.

Even if you were to become sick with anthrax, you could not pass on the illness to your children or others. Also, being exposed to anthrax does not mean you will develop anthrax disease. Our bodies have defenses against bacteria, so not everyone who comes into contact with the bacteria will become ill with anthrax. Even if someone were to put the bacteria that causes anthrax in your workplace or other place on purpose, it is highly unlikely that you would carry the bacteria home to your children on your clothes or hair.

How Do You Get It?

Humans can become infected with anthrax by handling products from infected animals or by breathing in anthrax spores from infected animal products (like wool, for example). People can also become infected with gastrointestinal anthrax by eating undercooked meat from infected animals. This is the least common form of anthrax. Anthrax can also be used as a weapon and intentionally dispersed in the environment.

What Are the Symptoms?

The symptoms (warning signs) of anthrax are different depending on the type of the disease:

- **Cutaneous:** The first symptom is a small sore that develops into a blister. The blister then develops into a skin ulcer with a black area in the center. The sore, blister and ulcer do not hurt.
- **Gastrointestinal:** The first symptoms are nausea, loss of appetite, bloody diarrhea, and fever, followed by bad stomach pain.
- **Inhalation:** The first symptoms of inhalation anthrax are like cold or flu symptoms and can include a sore throat, mild fever and muscle aches. Later symptoms include fever, (greater than 100 degrees F.) cough (usually a non-productive cough), chest discomfort, shortness of breath, tiredness and muscle aches. (Caution: Do not assume that just because a person has cold or flu symptoms that they have inhalation anthrax.) In most cases, anthrax can be distinguished from the flu, because the flu has additional symptoms, such as runny nose.

How Soon Do Infected People Get Sick?

Symptoms can appear within 7 days of coming in contact with the bacterium for all three types of anthrax. For inhalation anthrax, symptoms can appear within a week or can take up to 42 days to appear.

How Is Anthrax Treated?

Antibiotics are used to treat all three types of anthrax. Early identification and treatment are important. The antibiotics used to treat individuals after exposure are very effective in preventing anthrax disease from occurring.

Prevention after exposure:

- Treatment is different for a person who is exposed to anthrax, but is not yet sick. Health-care providers will use antibiotics (such as ciprofloxacin, doxycycline, or penicillin) to prevent anthrax infection.
- Early antibiotic treatment of persons exposed to anthrax is essential.
- Persons who may have been exposed to anthrax should contact their physician immediately.

Treatment after infection:

- Treatment is usually a 60-day course of antibiotics. Success depends on the type of anthrax and how soon treatment begins.

Can Anthrax Be Prevented?

Vaccination: There is a vaccine to prevent anthrax, but it is not yet available for the general public. Military personnel, laboratory workers who work directly with the organism, persons who handle infected animal products, imported hides or furs regularly, and workers who may enter or re-enter contaminated areas, may get the vaccine.

For More information:

Jefferson County, Colorado: visit: <http://health.jeffco.us>

Centers for Disease Control:

www.bt.cdc.gov/agent/anthrax or call the CDC public response hotline at (888) 246-2675 (English), (888) 246-2857 (español), or (866) 874-2646 (TTY)