

Facts

from Jefferson County Public Health



Anthrax: what you need to know

What is anthrax?

- Anthrax is a serious disease caused by bacteria that form spores. A spore is a cell that is dormant (asleep), but may become active under the right conditions.

How do you get infected with anthrax?

- There are three kinds of infections: on the skin, in the lungs or in the digestive tract.
- People can be infected with anthrax by working with infected animals or animal products, such as wool, or eating undercooked meat from infected animals.
- Anthrax has been used as a weapon, spread in powder form through the mail.
- Anthrax can't spread from person to person.
- Someone who is sick with anthrax does not have to be kept away from other people.

What the symptoms of anthrax?

- On the skin, a small sore develops into a blister. The blister develops into an ulcer with a black area in the center. The sore, blister and ulcer usually do not hurt.
- In the digestive tract, you might have nausea, loss of appetite, bloody diarrhea and fever, followed by extreme stomach pain.
- In the lungs, you would notice sore throat, fever and muscle aches, similar to flu. Later symptoms include cough, chest discomfort, shortness of breath, tiredness and muscle aches.
- Symptoms can appear as soon as one week, or could take as long as 42 days in the case of anthrax in the lungs.

How is anthrax treated?

- Antibiotics can cure anthrax, if it is identified early and treated quickly.
- When antibiotics are prescribed by your doctor, it is important to take all the medicine for the full time directed. This is because antibiotics can stop working against infections and have serious side effects when they are not needed.

Can anthrax be prevented?

- There is a vaccine to prevent anthrax, but it is only for people who are likely to come into contact with anthrax in their jobs.
- If anthrax were to be used as a weapon, those people who were exposed to the bacteria would be able to get the vaccine.

What should I do if I think I have been exposed to anthrax?

- Call the police if you think you have been exposed to a suspicious powder from a package or letter. Then talk to your doctor or local health department.

What is public health doing to prepare for an anthrax attack?

- Public health departments are prepared to respond to attacks by terrorists with bioweapons.
- Colorado has laboratories that can test for anthrax in the environment or in people. Veterinarians (animal doctors) and laboratories are watching for cases of anthrax.
- There are antibiotic medicines in the Strategic National Stockpile stored all over the country in case of an anthrax attack.
- CDC, state and local health agencies have plans for how to distribute the free medicines quickly to the people who need them.

Where can we get more information?



Colorado HELP hotline (CO HELP)

1-877-462-2911 (toll-free)
M-F 7 a.m. - 11 p.m.; S-S 9 a.m. - 5 p.m.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

<http://emergency.cdc.gov/agent/anthrax>
1-800-311-3435 (toll-free)

