



Anthrax

What is Anthrax?

Anthrax is an infectious disease caused by the bacteria *Bacillus anthracis*, which is capable of forming spores. Anthrax can occur in three forms: cutaneous (skin), inhalation (lung) and gastrointestinal (stomach and intestines).

Types and Symptoms:

- **Cutaneous (skin)**, the most common form of the disease, occurs when the spores come in contact with an area of skin that is broken, such as a cut or a sore. This type of anthrax is marked by an ulcer with a black center. The ulcer does not hurt. This form of anthrax responds very well to antibiotics if treatment is started soon after symptoms appear.
- **Inhalation (lung)** occurs when a large number of spores of a certain size are inhaled into the lungs. It begins as a fever, muscle aches, fatigue and cough. Symptoms may become more severe with shortness of breath, respiratory (lung) failure, meningitis (infection of the spinal fluid) or death. Patients with this type of anthrax are treated in hospital intensive care units.
- **Gastrointestinal (stomach and intestines)** anthrax is rare. This form may begin with nausea, loss of appetite, bloody diarrhea and then bad stomach pain.

Anthrax in Nature:

Is it spread from person to person?

No.

Can you get anthrax from animals?

Humans can become infected with anthrax by handling products from anthrax infected animals or by breathing in anthrax spores from infected animal products.

What about livestock and pets?

All mammals appear able to get anthrax, but animals that chew their cud, such as cattle, sheep and goats, are the most commonly affected, followed by horses and pigs. Cats and dogs are also susceptible to anthrax.

How do animals get anthrax?

Animals are usually infected by swallowing spores from contaminated food or water. Spores can be picked up directly from the soil through grazing or from feed grown in infected soil.

Do animals get sick like people?

The time period from when an animal gets the germ to when it gets sick is usually three to seven days with a range of one to 14 days or more. Sudden death in animals that appeared normal a few hours earlier is common. In swine, dogs and cats, there is apparently a natural resistance and recovery from anthrax is likely.

If an animal has died of anthrax, what is the risk to people?

Veterinarians and other personnel should take precautions to avoid skin contact with carcasses and soil that might have the germ.

Bioterrorism:**Can anthrax be used as a weapon?**

Anthrax has been used as a weapon. In 2001, anthrax was spread deliberately through the postal system by sending letters with powder containing anthrax. This caused 22 cases of anthrax infection and several deaths.

How will I know if I have been exposed to inhalation anthrax?

It will depend on how the germ is released, where it was released and where you were in relation to the release site. The further away you were from the release site, the less likely it will be that you were exposed.

How soon will symptoms develop (incubation period)?

Symptoms may start from one to six days after exposure to the bacteria. The bacteria can live for a long time in the environment and symptoms may not start for up to 60 or more days after coming in contact with the germ.

How is anthrax treated?

Antibiotics are used to treat all three types of anthrax. Early detection and treatment are important. Treatment is different for a person who is exposed to anthrax, but is not yet sick. Health care providers will use antibiotics to prevent sickness.

Can anthrax be prevented?

There is a vaccine to prevent anthrax, but it is not yet available for the general public.

What should I do if I think I've been exposed?

Contact local law enforcement right away if you think you may have been exposed to anthrax. This includes being exposed to a suspicious package or envelope that contains powder.

What if anthrax is used as a weapon here?

If there is a suspected anthrax exposure event here, you will be offered an antibiotic that you may have to take up to 60 days. The local health department will provide the medicine you need to take and tell you how it should be taken.

For more information on anthrax, visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website at www.cdc.gov or the North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services website at www.agr.state.nc.us/vet or call the Guilford County Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Public Health at (336) 641-7777.

