

What is Anthrax?

Anthrax is a bacterial, zoonotic disease caused by *Bacillus Anthracis*. Anthrax occurs in domesticated and wild animals, including goats, sheep, cattle, horses and deer, but other animals may be infected. Anthrax is an invisible bacteria that can live in soil, water, and dead animals.

What Are the Symptoms and Effects of Anthrax?

After an incubation period of 1-7 days, the onset of inhalation anthrax is gradual. Possible symptoms include:

- fever
- malaise
- fatigue
- cough
- mild chest discomfort followed by severe respiratory distress

A mild illness can progress rapidly to respiratory distress and shock in 2-4 days. This is followed by a range of more severe symptoms including difficulty breathing, exhaustion, tachycardia and cyanosis. Shock and death occur within 24-36 hours after onset of severe symptoms.

What Is the Treatment for Anthrax?

Treatment with antibiotics beginning one day after exposure to a lethal aerosol challenge with anthrax spores (8,000 - 22,000 spores) has been shown to provide significant protection.

Penicillin, doxycycline, ciprofloxacin, are all effective against most strains of anthracis. Penicillin is the treatment of choice for naturally occurring anthrax. For post-exposure prophylaxis the administration of antibiotics should be continued for at least 4 weeks in those exposed and if available, those exposed should receive 3 doses of vaccine before antibiotics are discontinued.

A vaccine is available and consists of a series of 6 doses over 18 months with yearly boosters. This vaccine, while known to protect against anthrax acquired through the skin, is also believed to be effective against inhaled spores.

Effective decontamination can be accomplished by boiling contaminated articles in water for 30 minutes or longer and using common disinfectants. Chlorine is effective in destroying spores and vegetative cells. Remember, anthrax spores are stable, able to resist sunlight for several hours and able to remain alive in soil and water for years.

What should I Look for regarding suspicious packages or mail?

- ✓ It's unexpected or from someone you don't know
- ✓ It's addressed to someone no longer at your address

- ✓ It's handwritten and has no return address or bears one that you can't confirm is legitimate
- ✓ It's lopsided or lumpy in appearance
- ✓ It's sealed with excessive amounts of tape
- ✓ It's marked with restrictive endorsements such as "Personal" or "Confidential"
- ✓ It has excessive postage

What should I do with a suspicious package or mail?

- ✓ Don't handle a letter or package that you suspect is contaminated
- ✓ Don't shake it, bump it, or sniff it
- ✓ Put the mail piece in a plastic bag
- ✓ Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water
- ✓ Notify local law enforcement authorities