



Salem/Cumberland County Health Department
ANTHRAX
(PUBLIC HANDOUT)

What is anthrax?

Anthrax is a disease caused by bacteria. Anthrax usually occurs in wild or family animals, like cattle, sheep, goats, and others. However, it can also occur in humans when they are exposed to infected animals or tissue from infected animals. There are three kinds of anthrax.

Skin Anthrax

This is the least serious form of anthrax. The first sign is a small, painless sore that develops into a blister. One or two days later, the blister develops a black scab in the center.

Intestinal/Stomach Anthrax

This is more serious than skin anthrax. The first signs are an unsettled stomach, loss of appetite, and fever, followed by severe abdominal pain. This is the least common form of anthrax.

Lung Anthrax

This is the most serious form of anthrax. This illness begins with symptoms like the cold or the flu. If caught early, lung anthrax can be treated with antibiotics. If it is not caught early and more serious symptoms develop, lung anthrax will usually result in death. Almost all cold and flu symptoms are NOT anthrax.

How common is anthrax and who can get it?

Anthrax is most common in farming areas where it occurs in animals. These areas include South and Central America, Southern and Eastern Europe, Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. Those who work with dead animals or their products are more likely to be at risk of being infected with anthrax.

How is anthrax spread?

The bacteria that cause anthrax can live in the soil for many years, and humans can be infected with anthrax by handling products from infected animals or by breathing in the bacteria from infected animal products. Anthrax can also be spread by eating undercooked meat from infected animals. It is rare to find infected animals in the United States.



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What are the symptoms of anthrax?

Symptoms of anthrax differ depending on how the disease was caught, but signs usually occur within 7 days.

Skin Anthrax:

Most anthrax infections occur when the bacteria enters an opening in the skin. The symptoms are as follows:

- Itchy bump that looks like an insect bite but within 1-2 days turns a painless ulcer. It is usually 1-3 centimeters in diameter, with an area of dying tissue in the center.
- Lymph glands in a nearby area may swell.

About 20% of untreated cases of skin anthrax will result in death.

Intestinal/Stomach Anthrax:

This form of anthrax may be a result of eating infected meat and causes intestinal problems.

First signs are as follows:

- Unsettled stomach
- Loss of appetite
- Vomiting
- Fever
- Abdominal pain
- Vomiting blood
- Severe diarrhea

Intestinal anthrax **can** result in death.

Lung Anthrax:

First signs may remind you of the common cold. After many days, the symptoms may develop into the following:

- Severe breathing problems
- Shock

Lung anthrax **usually** results in death.



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Can anthrax be spread from person-to-person?

Direct person-to-person spread of anthrax is very rare. Visiting patients with lung anthrax is not a problem.

How is anthrax detected?

There are blood tests that test for anthrax. Also, for lung anthrax, chest x-rays can be done to look for certain reactions to the bacteria.

How is anthrax treated?

Doctors can use antibiotics. Treatment should begin early, if left untreated, the disease can cause death.

Ways to prevent infection:

- ✓ Avoid contact with farm animals and animal products.
- ✓ Avoid eating meat that has not been properly butchered or cooked.

Is there a vaccination for anthrax available to the public?

A vaccine has been developed for anthrax but at this time it is only available for high-risk groups of people. The following groups of people are considered to be high-risk:

- People who work directly with anthrax in a lab setting.
- People who work with imported animal hides or furs in areas that have low standards in limiting exposure to anthrax.
- People who may handle infected animal products in areas where exposure to anthrax is possible.
- Military staff sent to areas with high risk of exposure to anthrax.



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