

PUBLIC HEALTH FACT SHEET

Anthrax

What is Anthrax?

Anthrax is a disease caused by bacteria. It can affect the skin, lungs or intestinal tract. Cutaneous (skin) Anthrax is the most common form. Intestinal Anthrax is the least common. Inhalation (lung) Anthrax is the most deadly form. Anthrax is found in hoofed mammals but it can also infect humans.

How is Anthrax transmitted?

Anthrax is not contagious; it cannot be spread from person-to-person. Anthrax can occur through wool processing, hide processing, handling infected animals, or inhaling Anthrax spores from contaminated bone meal used in home gardening. Exposure can also occur through a bio terrorist event.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms vary depending on how the disease was spread, but usually occur within 7 days after contact.

Inhalation (lung): The first signs may look like a common cold. After several days, the symptoms may lead to severe breathing problems and shock. Inhalation Anthrax is often fatal.

Intestinal: The first signs are nausea, loss of appetite, vomiting, and fever followed by stomach pain, vomiting of blood, and severe diarrhea.

Cutaneous (skin): The first sign is a pimple that could contain fluid, progressing to a depressed black ulcer; the area is swollen, red; and often painless.

What are the types of Anthrax Infection?

There are three forms of Anthrax infection: Cutaneous (skin), inhalation and gastrointestinal.

Inhalation Anthrax (Infection in the lung) results from inhaling spores of the Anthrax bacteria. The Anthrax bacteria can be found in industrial processes such as tanning hides and processing wool or bone.

Intestinal Anthrax comes from ingesting contaminated undercooked meat. There is no evidence that milk from infected animals transmits Anthrax.

Cutaneous (skin) Anthrax is caused by contact with tissues of animals dying of the disease; or by contact with hair, wool, hides, or products made from them. Contact with soil associated with infected animals or contaminated bone meal used in gardening is also a source of infection.

Person-to-person spread of Anthrax is not likely, if it occurs at all. There is no need to treat contacts of persons ill with Anthrax, (such as household contacts, friends, or coworkers), unless they are also exposed to the bacteria.

What are the complications from Anthrax?

If treated promptly, recovery from Anthrax is complete.

Is there treatment for Anthrax?

Persons who have come in contact with an Anthrax source can be protected from the disease with antibiotics. They should receive treatment as soon as possible (ideally within 24 hours).

How can Anthrax be prevented?

There is an Anthrax vaccine used by the military. It is not yet available to the general public. It is important to remember that Anthrax infection rarely occurs.

For more information on Anthrax, call (248) 858-1406 or toll free 1 (800) 848-5533.