

Anthrax

Personal Health Fact Sheet

What is Anthrax?

Anthrax is a disease caused by the spore forming bacterium Bacillus anthracis. The disease is usually associated with livestock. The agent has been used in a bioterrorism incident. In the event of a bioterrorism incident, the probable route of exposure would be drinking the bacteria from contaminated water or breathing bacteria spread through the air. There are three forms: cutaneous, inhalation, and gastrointestinal.

How is it spread?

You can get anthrax by handling infected animals, eating infected meats or by breathing in bacteria. The bacteria are resistant to drying and can remain alive for long periods of time. The disease is **not** contagious person to person. Direct person-to-person spread of anthrax from the skin or clothing of a contaminated individual is theoretically possible but is extremely unlikely, *especially if the person has been properly decontaminated prior to coming into contact with others.*

How is it treated?

A high dose ciprofloxacin, or doxycycline, or amoxicillin are used. All forms of the disease must be treated promptly. If not treated before symptoms begin, inhalational anthrax is nearly always fatal. Until the disease is excluded from an anthrax affected area, it is recommended that all persons with fever or evidence of systemic disease be treated.

How can we prevent Anthrax?

- ▶ If exposed by an aerosol, wash off with soap and water.
- ▶ If contaminated with an aerosol, change clothes.
- ▶ Antibiotics are also used to prevent anthrax from developing in people who have been exposed to anthrax, but are not yet sick. Ciprofloxacin, doxycycline, and amoxicillin are taken for up to 60 days after the exposure, are usually recommended.
- ▶ An anthrax vaccine is not recommended for the general public but is routinely given to military personnel and laboratory personnel.

SYMPTOMS OF ANTHRAX

- ▶ Symptoms usually occur within 2 to 7 days after exposure to the bacteria.
- ▶ **Cutaneous** – spores or bacteria can enter the body through cuts or breaks in the skin causing itching, boils, and formation of a black scab. Severe skin infections can result in sepsis.
- ▶ **Gastrointestinal** – eating infected meat or drinking contaminated water will result in gastrointestinal symptoms such as nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea.
- ▶ **Inhalation** – causes chest pain and difficulty breathing and is the most severe form of the disease, usually resulting in death unless treated before the patient becomes symptomatic.



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