



FACT SHEET Anthrax

What is anthrax?

Anthrax is a serious disease caused by *Bacillus anthracis*, a type of bacteria that forms spores. Anthrax usually occurs in animals such as cattle, sheep, horses, and goats. It has been rare in humans in the United States. There are three types of anthrax – skin (cutaneous), lung (inhalation), and digestive (gastrointestinal).

How do people get infected with anthrax?

The bacteria that cause anthrax are usually found in soil. They can live as spores for many years, but naturally occurring cases of anthrax are rare.

What are the symptoms of anthrax?

The symptoms of anthrax are different depending on the type of infection.

- Skin (cutaneous): The first symptom is a raised bump. Within one to two days it develops into a blistered sore, and then a painless ulcer with a characteristic black area in the center. Lymph glands in the area near the wound may swell.
- Lung (inhalation): Early symptoms of inhalation anthrax are like cold or flu symptoms (sore throat, cough, mild fever, muscle aches). These symptoms may last two to three days then appear to get better for one to two days. After this time, severe breathing problems and shock can occur.
- Digestive (gastrointestinal): Early symptoms include nausea, loss of appetite, bloody diarrhea, and fever, followed by bad stomach pain.

How soon do infected people get sick?

- Symptoms can appear within one week of being exposed for all three types of anthrax.
- It may take up to six weeks for symptoms to appear with inhalation anthrax.

Can anthrax be spread from person to person?

No. Anthrax is not spread from person to person. Contacts of people sick with anthrax do not need to be treated unless they were also exposed to the same source of infection.

Is there anything that can be done to prevent the disease once a person has been exposed to anthrax?

Yes. Early treatment with antibiotics is essential. A number of readily available antibiotics can be used to treat anthrax infection.

How is anthrax treated?

Antibiotics are used to treat all three types of anthrax. Early identification and treatment is critical. Treatment is different for a person who is exposed to anthrax but is not yet sick when compared to a person who is showing signs of an anthrax infection. Antibiotics are used in combination with the anthrax vaccine to prevent anthrax infection.