



ANTHRAX

What is ANTHRAX?

Anthrax is a disease caused by a spore-forming bacterium that mostly occurs in grazing animals. It is rarely found in the United States. There are three types of anthrax: skin, inhalation, and gastrointestinal. Most cases occur on the skin, also known as cutaneous anthrax. Inhalation anthrax does not occur naturally.

Transmission:

Anthrax is not transmitted person-to-person except rarely from skin lesions. People can become infected by handling or eating infected animal products or by breathing it in from an airborne form. Anthrax can be sprayed from any container capable of producing a very fine mist. It has also been used to contaminate mail.

Signs and Symptoms:

Skin (cutaneous) anthrax infection begins as a raised, itchy bump, similar to an insect bite. The bump then changes into a blister, then to a scab with a blackened center.

Lung (inhalation) symptoms begin as an illness similar to the flu and can include coughing, chest pain, sore throat, mild fever, muscle aches, and tiredness. Symptoms may improve briefly before quickly worsening to severe breathing problems and shock.

Digestive (gastrointestinal) symptoms begin with nausea, loss of appetite, vomiting and fever, followed by stomach pain, vomiting blood, and severe diarrhea. This form is very rare. For all three types of anthrax, people will become sick within seven days. For inhalation anthrax, it may take up to 42-60 days for symptoms to appear.

Treatment:

Antibiotics are available for all forms of anthrax infection. Inhalation anthrax is difficult to treat unless diagnosed very early in the course of the infection.

Diagnosis:

Anthrax is diagnosed by skin biopsy or blood tests.

Prevention:

Vaccine is not available for the public and is currently only used by the Armed Forces, laboratory workers, veterinarians, and those who work with furs and animal hides. Anyone exposed to anthrax can be given antibiotics to help prevent the disease.

What can you do?

Report any suspicious powders or mail pieces to local law enforcement.

Whom do you call?

Division of Public Health: 1-888-295-5156

For more information:

Visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website:
www.cdc.gov/anthrax.