



## 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.

A biological attack, or bioterrorism, is the intentional release of viruses, bacteria, or other germs that can sicken or kill people, livestock, or crops. *Bacillus anthracis*, the bacteria that causes anthrax, is one of the most likely agents to be used in a biological attack.

### Who gets anthrax?

Most people will never be exposed to anthrax. However, certain occupations and activities have a greater risk of exposure, including:

- Laboratory professionals
- People who come in contact with infected animals or handle animal products such as wool, hides or hair, and raw or under-cooked meat from infected animals.
- Mail handlers, military personnel, and response workers
- Travelers, most commonly in the agricultural regions of Central and South America, Sub-Saharan Africa, Central and southwestern Asia, Southern and eastern Europe, and the Caribbean.

### How is anthrax spread?

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

### What are the symptoms of anthrax?

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.



# Frequently Asked Questions

Digestive symptoms begin with nausea, loss of appetite, vomiting, and fever, followed by stomach pain, vomiting blood, and severe diarrhea. This form is very rare.

It is important that you seek medical care as quickly as possible to have the best chance with full recovery, although anthrax is not contagious.

### **How soon do symptoms appear?**

For most types of anthrax exposures, people will become sick within seven days. For inhalation anthrax, it typically takes up to 42 to 60 days for symptoms to appear.

### **Should an infected person be excluded from work or school?**

Unless skin lesions are present, exclusions are not necessary for work or school.

### **What is the treatment for anthrax?**

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.

### **What can a person or community do to prevent the spread of anthrax?**

A 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. Follow the proper safety precautions to prevent the spread of anthrax.

Anyone exposed to anthrax can be given antibiotics to help prevent the disease. Report any suspicious powders or mail pieces to local law enforcement.

### **Resources**

<https://www.cdc.gov/anthrax/animal-products/index.html>