

IDRS Infectious Disease Reporting System

Disease Reporting 24 Hours a Day

Columbus Public Health and Franklin County Public Health

ANTHRAX

Anthrax is a serious disease caused by *Bacillus anthracis*, a kind of bacteria that forms spores. A spore is a bacteria cell that is dormant (asleep) but may come to life with the right conditions.

There are three types of anthrax:

- **skin (cutaneous)**
- **lungs (inhalation)**
- **digestive (intestinal)**

Symptoms

- **Inhalation anthrax** is caused by breathing in anthrax spores. Initial symptoms may resemble a common cold. After several days, the symptoms may progress to severe breathing problems and shock. Inhalation anthrax is usually fatal. Symptoms can appear within a week or can take up to 42 days to appear.
- **Skin anthrax** is caused when the anthrax bacteria touch skin that has a cut or break in it. After 1 to 7 days, the exposed area develops a raised, itchy bump that resembles an insect bite. Within 1-2 days the bump becomes a small blister. This blister then becomes a painless sore with a black center.
- **Intestinal anthrax** is caused by eating meat from an animal that has died of anthrax or by drinking other foods or liquids contaminated with anthrax bacteria. It causes nausea, vomiting, fever, pain in the abdomen, and diarrhea. Intestinal anthrax symptoms appear within 1 to 7 days after exposure.
- If untreated, each of these forms of anthrax can spread to the blood, brain, or spine and cause severe illness or death.

Transmission

- Anthrax does not spread from one person to another.
- **Soil:** Anthrax spores can live for decades in soil and may infect people when soil is disturbed. This is more common in the Western United States and some developing countries.
- **Animals:** Humans can become infected with anthrax by handling or being around infected wool, furs, or other animal products. People also can become infected with intestinal anthrax by eating undercooked meat from infected animals.
- **Terrorism:** Anthrax also can be used as a bioterrorist weapon. This happened in the United States in 2001, when anthrax was deliberately spread by sending letters with powder containing anthrax.

Treatment

- There is no laboratory test for anthrax before symptoms begin. Antibiotics are used to treat all three types of anthrax. Treatment is usually a 60-day course of antibiotics. Treatment is most successful when it begins as quickly as possible.

Prevention

- Treatment is different for a person who is exposed to anthrax, but is not yet sick. Health-care providers may use antibiotics (such as ciprofloxacin, levofloxacin, doxycycline, or penicillin) to prevent anthrax infection in people who have been exposed.

All information is general in nature and is not intended to be used as a substitute for appropriate professional advice.



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