

How can I protect myself from being infected with anthrax?

Your chances of being infected with anthrax without a confirmed exposure to anthrax bacteria are extremely low. Intact skin provides an excellent barrier for most biological agents.

The average citizen is not a likely to receive a letter or package contaminated with anthrax. But it's a good idea to check the mail before opening it to detect any suspicious package or letter. A suspicious package or letter might be:

- Mail from someone you don't know
- Mail with no return address or identifying labels
- Mail with a handwritten or poorly typed address
- Mail with misspellings of common words
- Mail with excessive postage
- Mail sealed with excessive amounts of tape
- Mail that appears stained, lopsided or lumpy in appearance
- Mail marked "personal" or "confidential"
- Mail containing a threat or received after a recent threat.

Do not open or shake suspicious mail. Leave it in place. Wash your hands with soap and water, and call your local police. If the letter or package has been opened, leave it in place. Leave the room, close the door, wash your hands, and call the local police.

More information is available at the following web sites: www.bergenhealth.org or www.cdc.gov at "In the News."



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Anthrax Facts



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What is anthrax?

Anthrax is a severe infectious disease caused by a bacteria called *bacillus anthracis*. Anthrax occurs in both wild and domestic animals, including cattle, sheep and goats.

How is anthrax spread?

Anthrax does not spread from person to person. It can infect humans who come into contact with infected animals, but animal infection in the U.S. is rare. Anthrax is found globally, but it is more common in developing countries or countries without veterinary public health programs.

Is there more than one type of anthrax?

Anthrax infections differ depending upon the way the bacteria enter the body. Anthrax can occur in three forms: cutaneous (skin), inhalation (lung), and intestinal (stomach and intestines).



What are the symptoms of anthrax and how is it treated?

Symptoms of the disease vary depending on how the disease was contracted, but usually occur within seven days after exposure.

Cutaneous: Most anthrax infections occur when the spores enter a cut or abrasion on the skin. A boil-like sore appears which eventually forms a depressed ulcer with a black center. There may be swelling around the sore, and nearby lymph glands may swell. Cutaneous anthrax responds well

to antibiotics if treatment is started soon after symptoms appear.

Inhalation: Initial symptoms may resemble influenza and include fever, fatigue, cough and chest pain. After several days, symptoms may progress to severe breathing problems and shock. Inhalation anthrax requires treatment with appropriate antibiotics.

Intestinal: The intestinal form of the disease follows the consumption of undercooked, contaminated meat and is characterized by inflammation of the intestinal tract. Initial symptoms include: nausea, loss of appetite, vomiting and fever followed by abdominal pain, bloody vomiting and severe diarrhea. Intestinal anthrax is also treated with antibiotics.

Should I be tested for anthrax?

A state laboratory tests materials that pose a credible threat to confirm the presence of anthrax. Unless the lab confirms that you have been exposed to anthrax, there is no reason to be tested.



Should I take antibiotics as a precaution?

Taking antibiotics is not recommended unless material contained in a letter or package is confirmed as anthrax. In fact, taking antibiotics when you are not sick can weaken the drug's ability to fight bacteria when you are sick. Antibiotics can also have harmful side effects and make diagnosing conditions more difficult. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have enough antibiotics to treat the disease, and will make them available when exposures are confirmed. Antibiotics should never be taken without the advice of a physician.