

ANTRHAX

WHAT IS ANTHRAX?

Anthrax is an illness caused by *Bacillus anthracis*, a bacterium that forms spores. A bacterium is a very small organism made up of one cell. Many bacteria can cause disease. A spore is a cell that is dormant (asleep) but may come to life with the right conditions. Anthrax is not known to spread from person to person.

There are three types of anthrax:

- ◆ Skin (cutaneous)
- ◆ Lungs (inhalation)
- ◆ Digestive (gastrointestinal)

HOW DO YOU GET ANTHRAX?

Anthrax from animals: Humans can become infected by handling infected animals or breathing in anthrax spores from infected animal products. People can also become infected by eating infected undercooked meat.

Anthrax as a weapon: Anthrax can also be used as a weapon as was seen in 2001. Anthrax was deliberately spread through the postal system by sending letters with powder containing anthrax. 22 people were infected with anthrax through those attacks.

SYMPTOMS

The symptoms or warning signs of anthrax are listed below according to type:

Cutaneous: The first symptom is a small sore that develops into a blister. The blister then develops into a skin ulcer with a black center. It does not hurt.

Gastrointestinal: The first symptoms are nausea, appetite loss, bloody diarrhea, and fever, followed by bad stomach pain.

Inhalation: The first symptoms are like cold or flu symptoms and can include a sore throat, mild fever and muscle aches. Later symptoms include cough, chest discomfort, shortness of breath, tiredness and muscle aches. (Caution: Do not assume that just because a person has cold or flu symptoms that they have inhalation anthrax.)

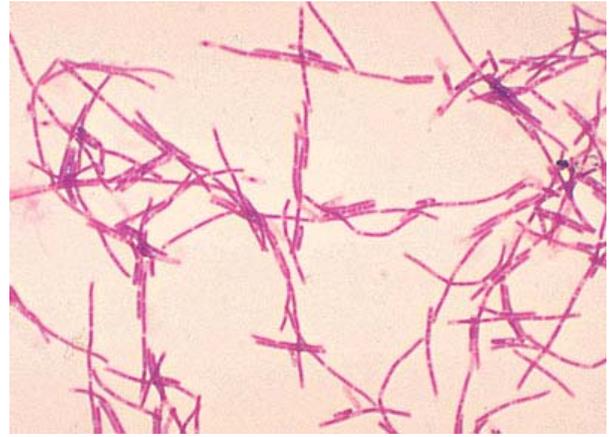


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TREATMENT

Antibiotics can be used to treat all three types of anthrax. In most cases, early treatment with antibiotics can cure cutaneous (skin) anthrax. There is only a 1% chance of death if treated early. Even if untreated, 80% of people who become infected with cutaneous anthrax will not die. Gastrointestinal anthrax is more serious because 25%-60% of cases lead to death if untreated. Inhalation anthrax is much more severe; in 2001, about half of the cases of inhalation anthrax ended in death. Early identification and treatment are important for all three types of anthrax.

IS THERE A VACCINE FOR ANTHRAX?

There is a vaccine to prevent anthrax, but it is not used for the general public. Anyone who may be exposed to anthrax, including military personnel, laboratory workers, and workers who may enter or re-enter contaminated areas, may get the vaccine. Also, in the event of an attack using anthrax as a weapon, people exposed may get the vaccine.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT:

Department of State Health Services
<http://www.dshs.state.tx.us>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)
<http://www.cdc.gov>