

What is anthrax?

Anthrax is a serious disease caused by *Bacillus anthracis*, a bacterium that forms spores. A bacterium is a tiny one-celled organism. Many bacteria can cause disease. A spore is a cell that is dormant (asleep) but comes to life under the right conditions. Anthrax is not known to spread from one person to another. There are three types of anthrax:

- Skin
- Digestive
- Lungs (from inhaling).

How do I get it?

Humans can become infected by handling products from infected animals, or by breathing it in from infected animal products (like wool). People can also become infected by eating undercooked meat from infected animals. Anthrax also can be used as a weapon. In the United States in 2001, it was deliberately spread through the postal system by sending letters with powder containing anthrax. This caused 22 cases of infection.

What are the symptoms?

The symptoms (warning signs) are different, depending on the type of the disease:

- Skin: The first symptom is a small sore that develops into a blister. The blister then develops into a skin ulcer with a black area in the center. The sore, blister and ulcer do not hurt.
- Digestive: The first symptoms are nausea, loss of appetite, bloody diarrhea, and fever, followed by severe stomach pain.
- Lungs: 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.

How soon do infected people get sick?

Symptoms can start within 7 days of coming in contact with the bacteria for all three types. If inhaled, symptoms can start within a week or take up to 42 days to appear.

How is it treated?

Antibiotics are used to treat all three types of anthrax. Early identification and treatment are important.

Prevention after exposure

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

Treatment after infection

Treatment is usually 60-days of antibiotics. Success depends on the type of anthrax and how soon treatment begins.

Other Questions?

Talk to your health care provider or call our Communicable Disease Program at 613-966-5500 or 1-800-267-2803 ext. 349. | TTY Dial 711 (1-800-267-6511) | hpePublicHealth.ca

Reference: Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, Anthrax, Feb 2006

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