

For Health Care Providers

# Anthrax vs Influenza

During this year's flu season you may have patients with flu-like symptoms and the "worried well" who seek medical care due to concerns about anthrax.

Postal workers and mail handlers have been identified as a risk group for anthrax based on recent cases identified on the East Coast. Due to increased anxiety among such workers nationwide, these persons in South Dakota may also seek medical care if they develop flu-like symptoms.

There have been no known human anthrax exposures in South Dakota since the September 11 events.

Ten recent cases of inhalational anthrax in the United States can be summarized clinically as follows\*:

- Incubation period: 4 days (range 4-6 days)
- Fever, chills: 100%
- Fatigue/malaise: 100%
- Nausea or vomiting: 90%
- Cough (minimal or nonproductive): 90%
- Elevated transaminases: 90%
- Dyspnea: 80%
- Sweats: 70%
- Chest discomfort or pleuritic pain: 70%
- Headache: 70%

Laboratory and radiographic findings for these 10 cases can be summarized as follows\*:

- Initial white blood count: median 9,800 (range 7,500 – 13,300)
- Elevated neutrophils: median 76% (range 43% - 83%)
- Abnormal chest x-ray or chest CT scan:
  - any abnormality: 100%
  - mediastinal widening: 70%
  - pleural effusions: 80%
  - infiltrates: 70%
- Blood cultures: *B. anthracis* isolated in all persons who did not receive prior antibiotics within 24 hours of culture

\*Ref: J.A. Jernigan et al., Bioterrorism-related inhalation anthrax: the first 10 cases reported in the United States. *Emerging Infectious Diseases* 7: 933-944.

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**South Dakota Department of Health  
1-800-592-1861**

**Influenza web site [www.state.sd.us/doh/news/immunize.htm](http://www.state.sd.us/doh/news/immunize.htm)**