



Diseases Fact Sheet - Anthrax

South Dakota Department of Health

Office of Disease Prevention Services - 605-773-3737 -(1-800-592-1861 in South Dakota only)

This material is provided for informational purposes only and is not a substitute for medical care. We are not able to answer personal medical questions. Please see your health care provider concerning appropriate care, treatment or other medical advice.

What is it?

Anthrax is a bacterial disease that can infect warm-blooded animals including humans.

Who gets anthrax?

Anthrax is primarily an occupational disease. It is occasionally in individuals who are exposed to dead animals and animal products such as wool, hair, and hides.

How is anthrax spread?

The spores of the anthrax bacteria can live in the soil for many years. Man may become infected with anthrax by inhaling contaminated soil particles, by contact with infected animal tissue, or by handling wool or hair from diseased animals. Infection of the intestinal tract can occur by eating undercooked meat from diseased animals. Anthrax is not spread person-to-person.

What are the symptoms of anthrax?

The symptoms vary depending upon the site of the disease. In skin, a boil-like lesion appears which eventually forms a black center. A swelling of the lymph gland under the arm may occur. In the lungs, symptoms may resemble the common cold and may progress to severe breathing problems and even death. The symptoms of intestinal anthrax include vomiting, nausea, fever, abdominal pain and diarrhea.

How soon after infection do symptoms appear?

The incubation period is usually within 7 days, but may be prolonged up to 60 days.

Is a person able to spread anthrax?

There are no reports of spread from human to human.

Does past infection with anthrax make a person immune?

A second attack with this disease is unlikely.

What is the treatment for anthrax?

Although effectiveness may be limited after symptoms are present, high dose antibiotic treatment with penicillin, ciprofloxacin or doxycycline should be undertaken. All forms of the disease must be treated promptly, and inhalation anthrax is nearly always fatal if not treated before symptoms begin. Individuals with fever or evidence of disease in an area where anthrax cases are occurring should be treated for anthrax until the disease is excluded.

What can be the effect of not being treated for anthrax?

The disease could be fatal in untreated cases.

What can be done to prevent the spread of anthrax?

Anthrax vaccine is available for people in high-risk occupations, such as military personnel, and individuals who work with imported animal hides, furs, wool, bonemeal, hair and bristles. To prevent anthrax, carefully handle dead animals suspected of having anthrax; provide good ventilation when processing hides, fur, hair or wool; and vaccinate animals.

Can anthrax be used as a biological weapon?

Yes, anthrax spores can be used as biological weapon. Please see the South Dakota Department of Health [bioterrorism fact sheet](#).

Related Sites:

- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)