



QUICK FACTS ABOUT....

Anthrax (Bacillus Anthracis)

What is anthrax?

Anthrax is a disease that commonly occurs in warm-blooded animals, such as goats, sheep, cattle, pigs, but can also occur in humans.

It is most common in regions where these animals are raised, especially in South and Central America, Asia, Africa, the Caribbean, the Middle East, parts of Europe, and rarely in the United States.

How can humans get anthrax?

There are three ways humans can get anthrax:

- through cuts or breaks in the skin from touching an infected animal or animal parts;
- by breathing or inhaling anthrax; or
- by eating undercooked meat from an animal infected with anthrax (this is very uncommon).

Humans are not very susceptible to infection, and person-to-person transmission of anthrax is very rare.

What are the symptoms of anthrax?

Symptoms depend on how a person was exposed to anthrax:

- If infected through the skin, the symptoms include an itchy rash that turns into a painless sore that appears black in the center. Lymph nodes in the area of the rash may swell. This type of exposure is very treatable, but if not treated, one in five people infected through the skin die.
- If infected by breathing anthrax, cold-like symptoms appear one to six days after exposure (most often within 48 hours), but then more severe breathing problems develop. Shock follows, and death usually occurs in one to two days after cold-like symptoms begin.
- If infected by eating contaminated meat, the symptoms include nausea, loss of appetite, vomiting and fever. More severe symptoms follow including: abdominal pain, vomiting of blood, and severe diarrhea. Death occurs in 25% to 60% of people exposed to anthrax by eating infected meat.

Can anthrax be treated?

Anthrax can be treated with certain antibiotics, but treatment must begin very soon after exposure. Inhalation anthrax should be treated prior to symptom onset to be most effective.

If not treated, anthrax can cause death.

Is there a vaccine to prevent anthrax?

There is an approved vaccine, and it is recommended for the following people:

- healthy people aged 18 to 65 years, who have been exposed to anthrax;
- people who investigate anthrax cases;
- United States military personnel.

What if I may have been exposed to anthrax?

Persons with possible exposure will be evaluated by public health officials to determine if antibiotic treatment should be started.

References:

[Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)

United States Department of Defense