

Anthrax

Anthrax is a bacterium (germ) that can cause disease in the lungs by breathing in the bacteria (inhalation), on the skin through open sores (cutaneous) or in the intestines by swallowing.

Anthrax infection is NOT spread from person to person.

How do you get anthrax?

There are two types of transmission:

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

How will I know if I was exposed to the germ?

It will depend on how the germ is released, where it is released, and where you were in relation to the release site. Unless you have been directly in contact with the substance it is not likely that you were exposed and the further away you were from the release site, the less likely it will be that you have been exposed.

How soon will symptoms develop (incubation period) if I have been infected?

Symptoms may start in 1-6 days after exposure to the germ. Since the germ can live for a long time in the environment, symptoms may not start for up to 60 or more days after the germ has been released in the air.

What are the symptoms of infection?

If the germ invades your lungs, you will have a fever, possibly a dry cough, and severe shortness of breath. If your skin is contaminated, an itchy, black spot with swelling may appear. If the germ is swallowed, you may develop a stomach ache, vomiting, and diarrhea that may be bloody.

How is the infection treated?

If you have the infection, your health care provider will treat you with antibiotics.

How is the infection prevented?

If the local health officer determines that you were exposed to the germ, but not known to be infected, you will be offered an antibiotic. Even if you take the antibiotic, you may develop the infection. If you develop symptoms such as fever or shortness of breath while you are taking the antibiotic, you should go to the nearest emergency service center or hospital immediately.

What should I do if I DO NOT have symptoms?

If you do not have symptoms of the infection, you should continue with your usual routine activities. Please DO NOT go to the hospital emergency room for an anthrax exposure, unless you have a fever and/or develop shortness of breath.

**Kalamazoo County Public Health
Emergency Information Line:
269-373-5300**

Visit our website at www.kalcounty.com

Should I get tested for anthrax?

No. Rapid testing and nasal swabs/serologic testing is used only for epidemiological purposes—to see how far in a building the bacteria has spread. This rapid testing is not used to determine the need for treatment. Other testing is used only in acute/critical illnesses as determined by your health provider.

Can anthrax be prevented?

Yes, by vaccination. However, while there is a vaccine to prevent anthrax, it is not yet available for the general public. Anyone who may be exposed to anthrax, including certain members of the U.S. armed forces, 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 would get the vaccine.

Why are we concerned about anthrax being used as a bioweapon?

Estimates of cases and deaths following the theoretical aircraft release of anthrax over an urban population predicts millions of deaths. In addition, early diagnosis of inhalation anthrax would be difficult and would require a high index of suspicion. The first evidence of a clandestine release of anthrax as a biological weapon most likely will be patients seeking medical treatment for symptoms of inhalation anthrax.

Where can I learn more about anthrax?

These websites provide regularly updated information about anthrax:

Kalamazoo County Health & Community Services: www.kalcounty.com

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC): www.cdc.gov

**Kalamazoo County
Health & Community Services**

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