



from the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment

About Anthrax

Anthrax: What you need to know

1 Anthrax is not contagious.

You can't catch anthrax from someone else. People who have an infection from anthrax bacteria do not need to be isolated or quarantined (kept away from other people).

2 Anthrax infections can be cured with antibiotic medicine.

With prompt treatment, anthrax infections can be cured. The government has purchased large quantities of antibiotic medicines and stored them all over the country. There is enough for everyone and if it is needed, it can be given to all who need it for free.

3 Public health officials are trained to respond quickly to a bioterrorist attack.

Since the attacks of 2001, public health has hired and trained thousands of professionals to help if the United States has another bioterrorist attack -- an attack using bacteria and viruses as weapons, with the intention of frightening and killing others.

What is anthrax?

Anthrax is a type of bacteria that has been around for a long time. It even is found in the soil in some areas of Colorado.

- Though it occurs in nature, anthrax bacteria may cause disease in people and animals. People can catch anthrax from animals with the bacteria, or from animal hides or uncooked meat.
- Anthrax also has been used as a weapon of terrorism.

How has anthrax been used as a weapon?

- Someone used anthrax bacteria as a weapon in 2001. This person deliberately made the anthrax into a powder and sent it through the mail. It killed five people, who died from breathing in the anthrax powder while they were handling the mail. More than 20 others became ill. Others got a serious skin infection from touching the anthrax powder.
- It is important to understand how limited this bioterrorism attack was.
 - √ Many people -- maybe thousands -- touched that mail with the anthrax bacteria, but not everyone got sick.
 - √ The chance you would get sick from anthrax is very low.
 - √ We don't know why some people get sick and others don't.

What happens if someone does get sick from anthrax?

- Someone could get an infection in their lungs from inhaling (breathing in) anthrax bacteria.
 - √ At first, it could feel like the flu. The person might feel weak and have a fever, cough, headache, chills and vomiting.
 - √ An infection from anthrax could cause breathing problems and lead to a serious illness, and even death.
- Skin anthrax, called "cutaneous anthrax," starts with a sore.
 - √ Usually the sore is not painful, but turns into a large black blister.
 - √ Sometimes the anthrax can move from the skin into the body and make a person very sick.
- Not everyone who touches or inhales anthrax will get sick because we are all different in how well our bodies fight illness.
- The skin sore or lung infection from anthrax bacteria can look like other common illnesses or infections.
- With medical tests, health care providers can find out if the infection is from anthrax.

Can someone catch anthrax from another person?

- No. People can't pass on the illness to anyone else.
- Someone who is sick with anthrax does not have to be isolated (kept away) from other people.

Can anthrax be cured?

- Yes. We have antibiotics that can cure anthrax if doctors find the infection soon enough.
 - √ Some of these antibiotics are ciprofloxacin, levofloxacin, doxycycline and penicillin.
 - $\sqrt{\text{People usually need to take the antibiotic pills for 60 days.}}$
- If you are given antibiotics for an anthrax infection, it is important to take the medicine exactly as instructed, and to take all of the medicine.

Can anthrax be prevented?

- Anthrax infections can be prevented with an anthrax vaccination (shot).
- The vaccination is approved for people in the military, people
 who work with animals and scientists who study the bacteria.
 The vaccine is not available for others right now, because the
 risk of coming into contact with anthrax bacteria is very low.
- The government has a supply of the vaccine, if anthrax is used again as a weapon.

What should I do if I think I have been exposed to anthrax?

- Only specially trained experts can tell if a package or envelope has anthrax.
- If you think that a package or letter could contain anthrax or any dangerous substance, call 911 to notify the police. Then talk to your health care provider or a public health agency.

GET SMART COLORADO USE ANTIBIOTICS WISELY



Antibiotics are strong medicine and can cause problems if they are not used correctly.

- 1 Only take the antibiotics prescribed for you by doctor.
- 2 Take ALL the antibiotics your doctor prescribes for you. You need to take all the pills, even if you start to feel better.
- **3** Do not share antibiotics with anyone.

Read more about safe antibiotics use at www.GetSmartColorado.com

What is public health doing to prepare for an anthrax attack?

- The state health department and local health agencies have plans for responding to another anthrax attack.
- Colorado public health agencies have teams of highly trained people ready to help control infections and illnesses.
- Veterinarians (animal doctors) and laboratories are watching for cases of anthrax.
- Colorado has laboratories that can test for anthrax in the environment or in people.
- There are stockpiles of antibiotic medicines all over the country in case of an anthrax attack. The medicines will be distributed for free to all who need them.

Should we keep antibiotics at home?

- Taking antibiotics when they are not needed can do more harm than good.
- Many antibiotics have serious side effects, especially for children or pregnant women.
- Using antibiotics when they are not needed can cause bacteria to become resistant to medicines. If this happens, antibiotics will not be effective if you get a bacterial illness such as sore throat, earache, or other infection.

Where will we get antibiotics if needed?

- The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has antibiotics stored all around the country in the Strategic National Stockpile (SNS).
- CDC, state and local health agencies have plans for how to distribute the medicines quickly to the people who need them.
- The medicine in the SNS will be FREE for everyone.

Where can we get more information?

Colorado HELP hotline (CoHELP)

1-877-462-2911 (toll-free) M-F 7 a.m. – 11 p.m.; S-S 9:30 a.m. – 8 p.m.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

http://emergency.cdc.gov/agent/anthrax 1-800-311-3435 (toll-free)



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