



District Health Department No. 2

Northeast Michigan's Community Health Department

ANTHRAX

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

What is Anthrax?

Anthrax is a serious disease caused by a spore-forming bacterium. Anthrax most commonly occurs in farm animals but can affect humans.

How Common is Anthrax and Who Can Get It?

Anthrax is most common in farming regions where it occurs in animals, but has occurred in wild livestock in the United States. Anthrax may also be used in biological warfare. Anyone who has not received the anthrax vaccine may contract the disease.

How is Anthrax Transmitted?

Anthrax can occur in three forms: skin, inhalation, and gastrointestinal. The spores can live in the soil for many years, and humans can become infected by handling products from the infected animals or by inhaling anthrax spores.

What are the Symptoms of Anthrax?

Symptoms of the disease vary depending on how the disease was contracted, but symptoms usually occur within 7 days:

- **SKIN:** Most anthrax infections occur when the bacterium enters a cut or abrasion. Skin infection begins as a raised itchy bump that resembles an insect bite, but within 1 to 2 days become pus-filled, then turns into a painless ulcer about the size of a dime (or smaller), with black dying areas in the center. Lymph glands near the sore may swell. Deaths are rare with appropriate therapy.
- **INHALATION:** Initial symptoms may resemble a common cold. After several days, there may be severe breathing problems and shock. Seek medical attention. Inhalation anthrax is usually fatal without early medical treatment.
- **INTESTINAL:** Caused by eating food that has anthrax on it, causes an acute inflammation of the intestinal tract. Initial signs include nausea, loss of appetite, vomiting, and fever followed by abdominal pain, vomiting of blood, and severe diarrhea. Without prompt medical treatment, death occurs in 25 to 60 percent of patients.

How is Anthrax Diagnosed?

Anthrax is diagnosed by isolating the bacterium from blood, skin lesions, or respiratory secretions, or by measuring the blood of infected.

For more information on Anthrax, please visit the Center's for Disease Control website at www.cdc.gov. or call District Health Department #2 at 1-800-504-2650.