



How to Respond to an Anthrax Threat

<http://www.gsa.gov/mailpolicy>

Objectives

- **Define**
 - What is anthrax and what do I need to know.
 - The three forms of anthrax and treatment.
- **Identify**
 - What to look for in a suspicious letter or package.
 - Steps you should take if anthrax is suspected.
 - General precautions for mail handling.
- **Know**
 - Who to call.
 - Frequently asked questions.
 - Resources.

What can you do to protect yourself?

The best approach to take in dealing with anthrax is to know more about anthrax.

Here are three key facts about anthrax:

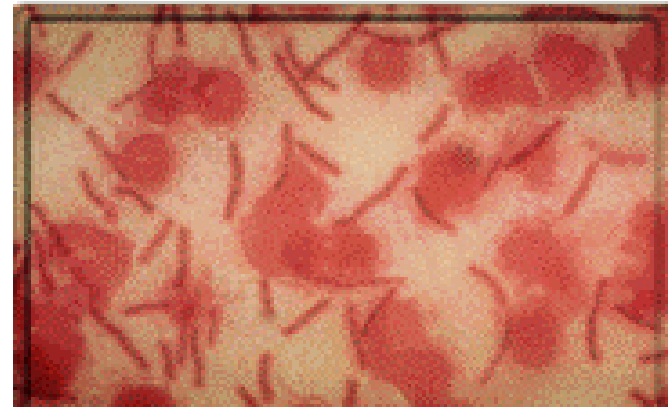
- **It is not contagious and does not spread from person to person.**
- **It is treatable, and we have antibiotics that can be used to treat it.**
- **Those antibiotics are effective.**

This basic briefing will give you more information about anthrax and bring a common sense perspective to what you can do.

What is Anthrax?

Anthrax is a bacterial, disease caused by Bacillus Anthracis. Anthrax occurs in domesticated and wild animals, including goats, sheep, cattle, horses and deer, but other animals may be infected. Anthrax is an invisible bacteria that can live in soil, water, and dead animals.

Microscopic Picture of Anthrax Spores



There are three forms:

- **Skin or cutaneous** form may be contracted by exposure to spores on an open area.
 - First appears as a rash or blister that may resemble a bite, progressing to a painless ulcer with a black area in the center.
 - Can be treated effectively with antibiotics.
 - Represents 95% of cases of human anthrax.
 - With treatment mortality rate is 1%.

- **Inhalational** may be contracted by breathing in spores or dispensing within a closed space, e.g. the air conditioning system.
 - **First appears as flu like symptoms (1 – 7 days)**
 - **Fever**
 - **Malaise**
 - **Fatigue**
 - **Cough**
 - **Mild chest discomfort followed by severe respiratory distress.**
 - **Can be treated with antibiotics if treatment is begun promptly.**

- **Gastrointestinal** must be ingested, most commonly through improperly cooked or contaminated meat.
 - First appears as intense stomach pains, vomiting and diarrhea.
 - Most cases appear within 48 hours.
 - Is extremely rare in the US as animals are vaccinated in high risk areas.
 - Can be treated with antibiotics if treatment is begun promptly.

How is Anthrax Diagnosed?

Anthrax is diagnosed by isolating *B.anthraxis* from the blood, skin lesions or respiratory tract or by measuring specific antibodies in the blood of person with suspected cases.

What Is the Treatment for Anthrax?

Treatment with antibiotics beginning soon after exposure has proven to be effective:

- **Penicillin**
- **Doxycycline (Tetracycline)**
- **Ciproflaxin (Cipro)**

What Is the Treatment for Anthrax? (continued)

Direct person to person spread of transmission is extremely unlikely. Therefore, there is no need to treat contacts of persons who have contracted anthrax unless they were also exposed to the same source of infection.

Now That We Know

- **What it is.**
- **How it is contracted.**
- **What treatment is available.**

**How can we reduce the threat
of exposure?**

Incidents Involving Anthrax

- **USPS delivers 208 billion pieces of mail per year.**
- **CDC confirmed cases of Anthrax as of November 1, 2001: 22 total cases, 4 deaths associated with inhalational.**

What Constitutes a Suspicious Letter or Package?

Some typical characteristics include:

Inappropriate or unusual labeling:

- **Excessive postage, no postage, or non-cancelled postage.**
- **Handwritten or poorly typed addresses.**
- **Misspellings of common words.**
- **Strange return address or no return address.**

What Constitutes a Suspicious Letter or Package?

(continued)

- Incorrect titles or title without a name.
- Not addressed to a specific person.
- Marked with restrictions, such as **“Personal,” “Confidential,” or “Do not x-ray”**.
- Marked with any threatening language.
- Postmarked from a city or state that does not match the return address.

What Constitutes a Suspicious Letter or Package? (continued)

Appearance

- **Powdery substance felt through or appearing on the package or envelope**
- **Oily stains, discolorations, or odor**
- **Lopsided or uneven envelope**
- **Excessive packaging material such as masking tape, string, etc.**

What Constitutes a Suspicious Letter or Package? (continued)

Other suspicious signs

- Excessive weight**
- Ticking sound**
- Protruding wires or aluminum foil**

If a package or envelope appears suspicious, DO NOT OPEN IT.

General Precautions for Mail Handling

- **Examine unopened envelopes/packages and look for suspicious features.**
- **Handle incoming mail in a designated separate area.**
- **Protective impermeable gloves should be worn by all workers who handle mail.**
- **Avoid touching your skin, eyes or other mucous membranes.**

General Precautions for Mail Handling

(continued)

- **Gloves can be discarded in a regular trash can once removed unless a suspicious mail piece is recognized.**
- **Hands should be thoroughly washed with soap and water when gloves are removed, before eating, and when replacing torn or worn gloves.**
- **Use letter opener to open mail.**
- **Restrict mail room access to authorized person.**

What Should You Do If You Receive an Anthrax Threat?

Handling of Suspicious Packages or Envelopes

- **Do not shake or empty the contents of a suspicious package or envelope.**
- **Do not carry the package or envelope, show it to others, or allow others to examine it.**
- **Put the package or envelope on a stable surface; do not sniff, touch, taste, or look closely at it or any contents that may have spilled.**

What Should You Do If You Receive an Anthrax Threat (continued)

- **Alert others in the area about the suspicious package or envelope. Leave the area, close any doors, and take actions to prevent others from entering the area. If possible, shut off the ventilation system.**
- **Wash hands with soap and water to prevent spreading potentially infectious material to face or skin. Seek additional instructions for exposed or potentially exposed persons.**

What Should You Do If You Receive an Anthrax Threat (continued)

- **If at work, notify a supervisor, a security officer, or a law enforcement official. If at home, contact the local law enforcement agency.**
- **If possible, create a list of persons who were in the room or area when this suspicious letter or package was recognized and a list of persons who also may have handled this package or letter. Give the list to both the local public health authorities and law enforcement officials.**

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: *Is anthrax contagious?*

A: No. Anthrax does not spread from person to person. It is a one-time agent; to catch it, a person must come directly in contact with the bacterium.

Q: *Should I keep a supply of antibiotics on hand, just in case?*

A: No. Antibiotics should only be taken under the supervision of a physician, who has done an evaluation to minimize the potential for side effects or interaction with other medication. There is also the “shelf life” of the medication to consider.

Frequently Asked Questions (continued)

Q: *Haven't there been a lot of hoax letters?*

A: Yes, but given the recent national and international events, and the confirmed exposures to anthrax, ANY incident will be responded to with the highest level of urgency.

Q: *Where is anthrax usually found?*

A: Anthrax can be found globally. It is more common in developing countries or countries without veterinary public health programs.

Frequently Asked Questions

(continued)

Q: *What protective clothing or equipment should I use if I handle mail?*

A: The CDC has been continually updating the recommendations for protecting workers from exposure to bacillus anthracis in work sites where mail is handled. To be updated check the web site at: <http://www.bt.cdc.gov>



What Sources are Available to Help Me?

There are a variety of resources available to help federal mail personnel cope with these threats and develop better means of responding:

For additional information:

<http://www.firstgov.gov> - your first click to the U.S. Government

<http://www.gsa.gov/mailpolicy> - training, policy and the latest information for federal mail managers.

<http://www.atf.treas.gov> - ATF Bomb Threats and Physical Security Planning.

What Sources are Available to Help Me?

(continued)

<http://www.cdc.gov> - The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is responsible for coordinating all public health and would be contacted at the Emergency Preparedness and Response Branch, National Center for Environmental Health to report an incident at 770-488-7100.

<http://www.opm.gov/guidance/index.htm> - Office of Personnel Management Post Disaster Guidance

<http://www.opm.gov/ehs/terrorism.htm> - Office of Personnel Management - Anthrax and Other BioTerrorism Issues

What Sources are Available to Help Me?

(continued)

<http://www.fbi.gov/contact/fo/info.htm> - To report suspected illegal intelligence or terrorism activity against the interest of the United States, telephone the ANSIR Coordinator at the FBI Field Office nearest you.

<http://www.framed.usps.com/postalinspectors> - **The U. S. Postal Inspection Service** is the law enforcement branch of the U.S. Postal Service. The Postal Inspection Service extends full cooperation to all federal, state and local authorities in law enforcement matters to ensure greater protection to the public.



Summary

Now that you know the:

- **Three** forms anthrax can take;
- **Treatment** for anthrax;
- **Incubation** period;
- Signs of what to look for in **suspicious letter or package**;
- **Person to call** to report threat.

You know the best approach to take!

GOD Bless America

God Bless America, Land that I love,

Stand beside her and guide her

Through the night with a light from above.

From the mountains to the prairies

To the oceans, white with foam,

God Bless America, My home sweet home

God Bless America, My home sweet home.

