

# Anthrax FACTSHEET

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## What is Anthrax?

Anthrax is an acute bacterial disease that can infect all warm blooded animals, including humans. It may occur in three forms. Cutaneous anthrax affects the skin, inhalation anthrax affects the lungs, and gastrointestinal anthrax affects the digestive tract. Of these, inhalation anthrax is the most serious.

## Who gets Anthrax?

In the pre-terrorism era, anthrax was primarily an occupational disease. It was identified in individuals who were exposed to dead animals and animal products such as wool and hair. Since 2001 it has been identified as a bioterrorism agent. It has the potential to:

- Spread across a large area
- Be a major public health treat
- Require a great deal of planning to protect the public's health

## What are the symptoms of Anthrax?

The symptoms of anthrax are different depending on the type of disease:

- Cutaneous (skin): The first symptom is a small sore that develops into a blister. The blister then develops into a skin ulcer with a black area in the center. The sore, blister, and ulcer do not hurt.
- Gastrointestinal (stomach and intestines): The first symptoms are nausea, loss of appetite, bloody diarrhea, and fever, followed by bad stomach pain.
- Inhalation (lungs): The first symptoms of inhalation anthrax are similar to cold or flu symptoms and can include a sore throat, mild fever, and muscle aches. Later symptoms include cough, chest discomfort, shortness of breath, tiredness, and muscle aches.

## How is Anthrax spread?

Humans can become infected with anthrax by handling products from infected animals or by breathing the bacteria that causes the disease from infected animal products (like wool, for example). It is rare to find anthrax-infected animals in the United States. People can also become infected with gastrointestinal anthrax by eating undercooked meat from infected animals. Anthrax is not spread from person to person.

## How soon do symptoms appear?

The symptoms can appear within 1 to 7 days of coming in contact with the germ that causes all three types of anthrax. For inhalation anthrax, symptoms can appear within a week or take up to 42 days to appear.



## Is a person with Anthrax contagious?

No, anthrax cannot be spread from one person to another.

## Is there a vaccine for Anthrax?

A vaccine is available to protect people in high-risk occupations such as military personnel. It is not yet available to the general public.

## Could Anthrax be used as a biological weapon?

Anthrax could be used as a biological weapon; however, it is not spread from person to person. The bacteria causing anthrax, *Bacillus anthracis*, could be aerosolized (made airborne) and cause illness in exposed individuals. In a situation where anthrax is used as a biological weapon, ill individuals would likely be hospitalized and treated with antibiotics and those exposed but not ill would receive preventive antibiotics and monitor their health.

## How is Anthrax treated?

Antibiotics are used to treat all three types of anthrax. Early recognition and treatment are important. Persons who are exposed to anthrax, but are not yet sick, will also be treated with preventive antibiotics.

## How can Anthrax be prevented?

Anthrax spread by infected animals can be prevented by vaccinating animals, carefully handling dead animals suspected of having anthrax, providing good ventilation when processing animal hides, fur, hair, or wool. Anthrax spread as a biological weapon can be prevented by early recognition of the disease and treatment of those exposed.

## Want more information?

Information about Anthrax and other related health topics can be found at the website [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov). The DC Department of Health promotes the health and safety of the District residents. For additional information, please call 202-442-9371/9143.

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