

PUBLIC HEALTH FACT SHEET



COUNTY MICHIGAN
HEALTH DIVISION

Department of Health & Human Services

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Anthrax

What is Anthrax?

Anthrax is a disease caused by *Bacillus anthracis*, a bacterium that forms spores. A spore is a dormant (asleep) form of bacteria that can survive for years. Anthrax is found in hooved mammals but it can also infect humans.

How is Anthrax spread?

Anthrax is not spread from person-to-person. Anthrax infection occurs naturally through wool and hide processing, handling infected animals, or inhaling Anthrax spores from contaminated bone meal used in gardening. Infection can also occur through a bioterrorist event.

What are the types of Anthrax Infection?

Cutaneous (skin) is the most common form caused by contact with tissues of animals dying of the disease; or by contact with hair, wool, hides, or products made from them. Contact with soil associated with infected animals or contaminated bone meal used in gardening is also a source of infection.

Inhalation (infection in the lung) is caused by inhaling Anthrax spores. The Anthrax bacteria can be found in industrial processes such as tanning hides and processing wool or bone.

Intestinal is the least common form caused from ingesting contaminated undercooked meat. There is no evidence that milk from infected animals transmits Anthrax.

How long after exposure do symptoms begin?

Symptoms vary depending on how the disease was spread, but usually occur within 7 days after contact.

What are the symptoms of Anthrax?

Cutaneous (skin): The first sign is a pimple that may contain fluid, progressing to a black ulcer; the area is swollen, red and often painless.

Inhalation (lung): The first signs may look like a common cold. After several days, the symptoms may lead to severe breathing problems and shock. Inhalation Anthrax is often fatal.

Intestinal: The first signs are nausea, loss of appetite, vomiting, and fever followed by stomach pain, vomiting of blood, and severe diarrhea.

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Is there a treatment for Anthrax?

Antibiotics are used to treat all three types of Anthrax infection. Early identification and treatment are important.

How can Anthrax be prevented?

Antibiotics are used to prevent illness after possible exposure to Anthrax spores. People should avoid eating meat that has not been properly slaughtered and cooked. There is a vaccine to prevent Anthrax infection, but it is not yet available to the general public.

For more information on Anthrax, call (248) 858-1406 or toll free 1 (800) 848-5533.

For additional copies, visit our website at www.oakgov.com/health.

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