



ANTHRAX

What is anthrax?

Anthrax is a zoonotic disease (diseases spread from animals to people) caused by the bacteria *Bacillus anthracis*. The bacteria produce spores that can survive in the environment for several years. Anthrax occurs around the world in wild and domestic livestock (such as cattle, sheep, swine and goats). Anthrax infection can occur in people exposed to infected animals or contaminated animal products. Anthrax is very rare in Canada.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms can appear within seven days and depend on the entry of bacteria into the body – skin, lungs or gastrointestinal. Skin infections are the most common, and symptoms include an itchy bump that develops into a boil and then into a painless sore, with a characteristic black centre. If not treated, the infection can spread. Symptoms of lung infections are high fever and difficulty breathing. Symptoms of intestinal infections include fever and diarrhea. Serious complications can develop.

How is anthrax spread?

Anthrax is usually spread by direct contact with or touching infected animals or animal products such as wool, bone, hair and hide. The bacteria can enter the body through cuts in the skin. Lung infections may occur by breathing in bacteria spores; for example, during industrial process of tanning animal hides. Intestinal infection occurs by eating infected meat that is not properly cooked.

How is anthrax diagnosed?

Anthrax is diagnosed by symptoms, history of exposure and laboratory testing.

Who is at risk of anthrax infections?

Usually occupational exposures to infected animals result in infections (veterinarians and workers handling potentially infected animal products).

How can anthrax be prevented?

Practise good personal hygiene. Wash hands thoroughly with soap and water after using the toilet, after handling animals, after handling raw meats and before preparing or eating food.

Practise basic food safety precautions. Thoroughly cook all meats (meat, poultry and seafood). Drink and eat only pasteurized dairy products (milk, cheese and yogurt).

Avoid water that might be contaminated. Do not drink untreated surface water.

Follow basic precautions when handling animals. Wear waterproof gloves and thoroughly wash hands after handling animals.

How is anthrax treated?

Antibiotics are used to treat anthrax successfully.

What is the Public Health response?

Health care providers and laboratories must notify cases of anthrax to Public Health. Public Health staff may interview the health care provider and patient (or caregivers) to find out how the infection occurred, identify other people at risk of infection, implement control measures and provide other advice.

Further Information

For additional information, contact your health-care provider, local [Public Health office](#), or Telecare 811.

Useful websites:

Public Health Agency of Canada
www.phac-aspc.gc.ca