

Anthrax – Frequently Asked Questions

(Revised 01/09/02)

What is anthrax?

Anthrax is a bacterium (germ) that may intentionally be released into the air (bioterrorism) and breathed (inhaled) into people's lungs causing severe respiratory distress. The germ can also get into open sores on the skin. Rarely the germ can be eaten and caused stomachache, vomiting and diarrhea.

Is anthrax spread from person to person?

The infection is NOT spread from person to person.

How will I know if I was exposed to the germ?

It will depend on how the germ is released, where it was released, and where you were in relation to the release site. The further away you were from the release site the less likely it will be that you were exposed.

How soon will symptoms develop (incubation period)?

Symptoms may start from 1 – 6 days after exposure to the germ. Since the germ can live for a long time in the environment, symptoms may not start for up to 60 or more days after the germ was released into the air.

What are the symptoms of infection?

If the germ invades your lungs, you will have a fever, possibly a non-productive cough, and severe shortness of breath. If the skin is contaminated, an itchy, black spot with swelling may appear. If the germ is eaten, you may develop a stomachache, vomiting, and diarrhea that may be bloody.

How is the infection treated?

If you have the infection, your health care provider (doctor or nurse) will give you an antibiotic.

How is the infection prevented?

If the local health officer determines that you were exposed to the germ, you will be offered an antibiotic. Even if you take the antibiotic, you may develop the infection. If

you develop symptoms such as fever or shortness of breath while you are taking the antibiotic, you should go to the nearest emergency service center or hospital immediately.

How long should I take the antibiotic?

You may have to take the antibiotic for a long time. The local health officer will make frequent announcements to give you the most current information.

What should I do if I DO NOT have symptoms?

If you do not have symptoms of the infection, you should continue with your routine daily activities. Please DO NOT go to the hospital emergency room unless you have a fever or you develop shortness of breath.

Where can I get more information?

The local health department will make frequent public announcements about who should receive the antibiotic, how to take the antibiotic, and where you can obtain the antibiotic. It is important that you listen to the radio or television for more information.

For additional information, please view [FAQ's about Anthrax](#) from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

References: Cahill, Christine K., MS, RN, CIC, Infection Control Consultant, California Department of Health Services. Licensing & Certification Program. [California Hospital Bioterrorism Response Planning Guide](#).

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