Fact Sheet

Anthrax

What is anthrax?

Anthrax is an infectious disease caused by bacteria. There are 3 forms of anthrax: cutaneous (the most common form), intestinal (the least common form), and inhalation (the most deadly form). Anthrax most commonly occurs in hoofed mammals, but can also infect humans.

Who can get anthrax?

Exposure to anthrax can occur through wool processing, hide processing, handling infected animals, or inhaling anthrax spores from contaminated bone meal used in home gardening. Exposure can also occur through a bioterrorist event.

What are the symptoms of anthrax?

Symptoms of disease vary depending on how the disease was contracted, but usually occur within seven days of exposure.

Inhalation (lung): Initial symptoms of infection may resemble a cold or flu. After several days, the symptoms may progress to severe breathing problems and shock. Inhalation anthrax is often fatal.

Intestinal: Initial signs may include nausea, loss of appetite, vomiting and fever, followed by severe abdominal pain, vomiting of blood, and severe diarrhea.

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

How is anthrax spread?

Inhalation anthrax results from inhaling spores of the anthrax bacteria. The anthrax bacteria can be found in industrial processes such as tanning hides and processing wool or bone.

Intestinal anthrax comes from ingesting contaminated undercooked meat. There is no evidence that milk from infected animals transmits anthrax.

Cutaneous (skin) anthrax is 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.

Direct person-to-person spread of anthrax is extremely unlikely, if it occurs at all. Therefore, there is no need to treat contacts of people ill with anthrax, such as household contacts, friends, or coworkers, unless they also were exposed to the same source of
What is the treatment for anthrax?
In people exposed to anthrax, infection can be prevented with antibiotic treatment. Early antibiotic treatment of anthrax is important. Waiting to be treated lessens your chances of survival.

How can anthrax be prevented?
An anthrax vaccine can prevent infection and is used by the military. However it is not available for the general public at this time.

How do I get more information on anthrax?
Van Buren/Cass District Health Department
Phone: (269) 621-3143

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
Web Site: http://www.bt.cdc.gov/agent/anthrax/
Phone: (888) 246-2675