

Anthrax Fact Sheet

Toledo-Lucas County Health Department | Emergency Preparedness



What is Anthrax?

Anthrax (*Bacillus anthracis*) is a serious infectious disease caused by gram-positive, rod-shaped bacteria known as *Bacillus anthracis*. Anthrax can be found naturally in soil and commonly affects domestic and wild animals around the world. Although it is rare in the United States, people can get sick with anthrax if they come in contact with infected animals or contaminated animal products. Contact with anthrax can cause severe illness in both humans and animals.

Who can get anthrax?

Anthrax is uncommon in the United States. Occasionally, however, it can infect animals such as cattle, as well as humans.

How is anthrax spread?

Anthrax can be spread through the following ways:

Skin (cutaneous), contact with:

- Infected animals, contaminated hair, wool or hide
- Products made from infected animals
- Inhalation of contaminated soil
- Breathing air contaminated with anthrax spores

Intestinal

- Eating under cooked meat from contaminated animals

Injection

- Contraction from heroin drug use

Direct person-to-person transmission of anthrax rarely, if ever, occurs.

What are possible symptoms?

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

Skin (cutaneous):

Appears as an itchy, pimple like bump that may contain fluid. In 1 to 2 days the bump changes into a skin ulcer, with a black center. The area may be red, swollen, and often painless.



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Lung (inhalation): Initial symptoms may be that of a common cold. After a few days, the symptoms may develop into severe breathing problems. Inhalation anthrax often results in death if not treated early.



Intestinal: Initial symptoms may include nausea, loss of appetite, vomiting, and fever, which may be followed by lower stomach pain, vomiting of blood, and severe diarrhea.



Injection: Type of anthrax infection has been identified in heroin-injecting drug users in northern Europe. Symptoms may be similar to those of cutaneous anthrax, but there may be infection deep under the skin or in the muscle where the drug was injected. Injection anthrax can spread throughout the body faster and be harder to recognize and treat.



How is anthrax diagnosed?

Anthrax can be diagnosed from blood, skin lesions, or respiratory discharge.

What is the treatment for anthrax?

In the early stage of the disease doctors can prescribe effective antibiotics or antitoxins for treatment. However, if left untreated the disease can lead to death.

If you have been in contact with any contaminated products and have the above symptoms, please see your doctor immediately.

For more information:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC):
<https://www.cdc.gov/anthrax>

The Toledo-Lucas County Health Department is committed to providing relevant and timely information during a public health emergency.

For the latest information, please visit:
www.lucascountyhealth.com



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