

Anthrax: What You Need to Know

What Is Anthrax?

Anthrax is a serious disease caused by bacteria that forms spores. Anthrax can make you sick by getting into your skin, lungs or digestive system. It can be deadly if untreated.

How Do You Get Anthrax?

The most common and also the most deadly form of anthrax is inhalation anthrax, which is caused by breathing in anthrax spores. People can also get anthrax from touching or eating an infected animal or breathing in spores from an infected animal. Anthrax can also be used as a weapon. In 2001, 22 people got sick when anthrax was put into the mail.

You cannot catch anthrax from another person or spread it to others.

What Happens If I Get Anthrax?

People usually get sick within 1 to 7 days of exposure to anthrax, but if it is in your lungs it may take 42 days before you get sick.

It may cause your skin to blister or have sores. You may have a sore throat, mild-fever, headache, cough and breathing problems.

You will need to be treated with medicine because anthrax can cause serious illness or death.

How Is Anthrax Treated?

There is no way to test for anthrax before you get sick.

Antibiotics are used to treat all types of anthrax. Health-care workers will give you medicine (doxycycline or ciprofloxacin). This medicine can help prevent an anthrax infection, even if you don't feel sick.

You may have to take this medicine for 60 days. The medicine can cause nausea, diarrhea, headache or a yeast infection (women only), but it is important that you keep taking the medicine until it is gone.

Children have to take different amounts of the medicine than adults. Health-care workers have information on how to give medicine to children and babies.

Is There An Anthrax Vaccine?

There is an anthrax vaccine, which is recommended for adults 18 through 65 years of age **who are at risk of exposure to anthrax bacteria**, such as certain laboratory workers and people who handle potentially infected animals. These people should get three doses of vaccine: the first dose when risk of a potential exposure is identified, and the remaining doses at one and six months after the first dose. After the six-month dose, the vaccine recipient is considered protected and can work in areas where there is a risk of exposure to anthrax. Boosters at 12 and 18 months, and annually thereafter, are recommended for ongoing protection.

Anthrax vaccine is also recommended for **unvaccinated people of all ages who have been exposed to anthrax**. The vaccine has not been studied or used in children less than 18 years of age and its use in exposed children must be under an Investigational New Drug (IND) program and requires informed consent from a parent or legal guardian. These people should get three doses of vaccine together with recommended antimicrobial drugs: the first vaccine dose as soon after exposure as possible, and the remaining doses two and four weeks after the first.