

# THIS IS ONLY A DRILL!!!

## ANTHRAX FAQ's

### For Individuals Potentially Exposed to Anthrax

#### **What is Anthrax?**

Anthrax is a serious disease caused by *Bacillus anthracis*, a bacterium that forms spores. A bacterium is a very small organism made up of one cell. Many bacteria (or germs) can cause disease. A spore is a cell that is dormant (asleep) but may come to life with the right conditions. There are three types of anthrax: skin (cutaneous), lungs (inhalation), and digestive (gastrointestinal).

#### **How Do You Get It?**

Historically, humans have become infected by handling spores from infected animals. Anthrax can also be used as a bioterrorism weapon. This happened in 2001 when anthrax was deliberately spread through the postal system within a letter. If anthrax spores were sent through the mail, people could be exposed by breathing spores (which could cause inhalation anthrax) or by touching contaminated mail or having spores settle on their skin and clothes (which might cause an anthrax skin infection). Anthrax is not known to spread from one person to another.

#### **Was I Exposed To Anthrax?**

Possible anthrax was detected. A sample was taken to a county laboratory, where tests will determine if anthrax was actually present. Results should be available within 12-24 hours.

An additional confirmatory test will be done at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). These results may take several days.

#### **How Can Anthrax Be Prevented?**

Decontamination reduces the risk of exposing others to anthrax spores. Potentially contaminated individuals must undergo decontamination, including removing contaminated clothing and washing with water and soap. When the individuals return home, they must take a full shower using soap and shampoo. With proper decontamination, there is an extremely low risk, if any, of spreading spores to family members.

Anthrax disease can be prevented by taking antibiotics soon after exposure and before symptoms appear. Ciprofloxacin, doxycycline or amoxicillin antibiotics are used as preventative measure.

#### **Is there a vaccine for anthrax?**

Yes. The CDC is anticipating that they'll provide the vaccine to exposed individuals if an outbreak of anthrax occurs.

**BEGIN taking the antibiotics as soon as possible.**  
**Within 12 hours after the alert, confirmatory lab results and further instructions on obtaining the additional 50 days of antibiotics will be available.**

### **Is My Family At Risk?**

No. IF you completed decontamination, your family is NOT at significant risk of developing anthrax. Wash any personal clothing or item worn at the area of exposure in a washing machine with laundry detergent or by using antibacterial, disposable wet wipes.

### **What Are the Symptoms of Anthrax?**

The symptoms (warning signs) of anthrax are different depending on the type of disease:

- **Cutaneous (skin):** The first symptom is a small sore that develops into a blister. The blister then develops into a skin ulcer with a black area in the center. The sore, blister and ulcer do not hurt.
- **Gastrointestinal (digestive):** The first symptoms are nausea, loss of appetite, bloody diarrhea, and fever, followed by bad stomach pain.
- **Inhalation (lungs):** the first symptoms of inhalation anthrax are like cold or flu symptoms and can include a sore throat, mild fever and muscle aches or profound sweating. Later symptoms can include cough, chest discomfort, and shortness of breath, tiredness and muscle aches.  
(Caution: Do not assume that just because a person has cold or flu symptoms that they have inhalation anthrax).

### **How Soon Do Infected People Get Sick?**

Symptoms can appear within 7 days of coming in contact with the bacterium for all three types of anthrax. For inhalation anthrax, symptoms can appear within a week or can take up to 42 days to appear.

### **What Should I Do If I Think I Have anthrax?**

If you are showing symptoms of possible anthrax infection, call your primary care provider immediately for evaluation.

# **ANTHRAX FAQ's: Decontamination Information**

## **How Can Anthrax Be Prevented?**

Anthrax disease can be prevented by going through decontamination and taking antibiotics soon after exposure and before symptoms appear.

Decontamination reduces the risk of exposing others to anthrax spores. The most effective method of removing anthrax spores is removal of outer clothing. 70%-95% of decontamination can be accomplished by removing outer clothing and shoes. When employees return home, they should also take a thorough shower using soap and shampoo. With proper decontamination, there is very little risk on spreading spores to family members.

The local fire department and the Yolo County Health Department will provide decontamination procedures and antibiotics for those exposed. As this may take several hours, your patience and cooperation is greatly appreciated.

## **Decontamination Steps:**

1. Law enforcement officers will escort your group to the decontamination area.
2. Enter modesty tent and place keys and wallet in small plastic bag marked *Personal Effects*. Seal bag and keep with you.
3. Remove outer garments (undergarments optional) and place in large bag marked *Clothing*. Seal bag and tear off the perforated identification strip. Place bag in the *Clothing Box* and keep the identification strip with you.
4. Go through *Technical Decontamination*: Enter and rinse body in an outdoor shower tent..
5. After decontamination, wear the Tyvek protective suit and booties, keeping head covering in place. Proceed to Mass Prophylaxis Clinic.
6. Upon returning home, remove hair covering and Tyvek suit; place in a plastic bag and dispose. Shower with soap, shampoo, and water.

## **Prophylaxis Antibiotics**

Prophylaxis antibiotics can prevent anthrax disease. Exposed individuals must undergo decontamination before entering the prophylaxis clinic. At the clinic, employees' will answer medical questions to help determine the appropriate medicine. Then the Yolo County Health Department will distribute a 10-day supply of antibiotics to all exposed individuals within the first fifteen hours.

**THANK YOU FOR YOUR PATIENCE AND YOUR COOPERATION.**