

Anthrax Threat Guide

ATTENTION: In the event of any terrorism threat: Call or have someone call 911 and tell them the manner of the threat and the specifics about what is going on/ and give them your exact location so they can find you; go to "Immediate Actions" on Page 2 of this guide.

This advisory is intended to provide potential recipients of letters or packages containing an anthrax threat with useful information and guidance to help them deal more effectively with such incidents, should they occur.

Background

Recently, throughout the U.S. there have been numerous threats of exposure to Anthrax. There has also been confirmation of cases of anthrax contracted by people on the East Coast. Most of what the country has seen has been hoaxes; however, we have now started to see actual events involving the use of anthrax as a weapon.

Anthrax is a disease caused by a bacteria (*Bacillus anthracis*) that can be spread in its dormant, or spore, form and is harmful only if a sufficient dose is inhaled, ingested, or introduced into an open cut or wound. If inhaled, the disease may characteristically begin with mild flu-like symptoms (i.e., muscle aches, fever, fatigue, and slight cough) usually 1-6 days after exposure, which may then progress after 2-4 days to more severe symptoms (i.e., high fever, shortness of breath). Anthrax is treatable with available antibiotics. Anthrax is NOT contagious (i.e., not spread from person-to-person); therefore, potentially exposed individuals need not necessarily be isolated or quarantined after being properly decontaminated.

Pre-Incident Planning / Precautions

While it is difficult for most Office's to prepare for such incidents, there are a few things that can be done before an incident, especially for those at higher risk facilities (i.e., health clinics, government facilities), to promote an effective and orderly response.

- Discuss the issue ahead of time to create a response plan that everyone understands and can follow.
- Provide your office with a supply of protective rubber gloves and a dust mask to be used when opening the mail if warranted and at your discretion.
- Be suspicious of letters that do not have a return address and consider opening all mail in pre-selected areas away from main work areas.
- Pre-identify nearby showers that can be used for decontamination in the event of an incident. Have soap and shampoo readily available.
- Have additional garments for workers who need to decontaminate available for their use.
- Do not blow into envelopes to open.
- Try to use a letter opener or some other device when opening mail.

Anthrax Threat Guide

Immediate Actions

If you receive a letter or package containing an Anthrax Threat:

- Close the envelope/package and gently put it down. Do not blow into the envelope or examine the contents further (leave it alone for the appropriate authorities to handle).
- Walk promptly out of the room and advise others in the immediate area (those sharing enclosed airspace's) to leave at once. Close the door. No one should be permitted to re-enter. (Note: those not in the immediate area of the opened package have very little risk of exposure.)
- The person(s) who directly handled the contents of the package should immediately wash their hands and arms thoroughly with soap and water.

Evacuation

Orderly movement of individuals to a safe distance from a hazard

- Of immediate concern is having people remove themselves from risk of exposure, however, nobody should leave the grounds. The extent of a building evacuation will depend on the circumstances of the situation and the comfort level of the individual(s) in charge. When in doubt, moving individuals outside or to an adjacent building is an acceptable option.
- While waiting for authorities, make a list of the names, addresses, and phone numbers of all persons in the immediate area of the incident to provide to the official in charge.
- Upon arrival, the authorities will provide assistance with appropriate evacuation procedures, collect pertinent information surrounding the incident and exposed individuals, and facilitate decontamination activities if necessary.
- The authorities will remove the package from the facility and decontaminate the affected area. Instructions will be provided as to when the affected area may be re-occupied to resume normal activities.

Decontamination

Removal of potentially harmful substances from the skin and clothes

- Decontamination may be necessary for those person(s) who directly handled or who may have come into contact with the package contents.
- If necessary, potentially exposed individuals should proceed calmly (this is not an emergency procedure) to the nearest showering facility or hoe, when instructed to do so by authorities.
- Remove clothing and personal effects and place in a sealed, air-tight tripple plastic bag (i.e., trash bags). Plastic bags with personal effects should be clearly labeled with the owner's name, address, phone number, and inventory of the bag's contents.
- Individuals should shower with soap and water, focusing on exposed skin surfaces such as hair, face, neck, and arms. Bleach solutions are not necessary and should not be used to decontaminate individuals.

Anthrax Threat Guide

The Next Step

Medical treatment and follow-up

- The authorities will have the contents of the package tested in a laboratory within 48 hours to ensure that you have not been exposed to any harmful substances. In the unlikely event that you have been potentially exposed to a harmful substance you will be contacted immediately and given further instructions for appropriate medical follow-up.
- Under most circumstances, those people potentially exposed to the contents of a threat letter do not need any further evaluation by a physician or treatment. However, if you develop symptoms or even a mild fever before laboratory results are available, you should immediately contact your personal physician and the authorities and inform them about your potential exposure. Individuals that are uncomfortable waiting for lab results and wish to consult with their local physician should also have them contact the state health department for appropriate medical information.