What is anthrax?

Anthrax has been used in terrorist attacks. It is a very serious disease. It is not contagious; you cannot get sick from someone who has anthrax.

How do you get anthrax?

There are 3 ways you can get anthrax:
• Through a cut or scratch on your skin.
• From breathing anthrax that is in the air.
• By eating food infected with anthrax.

How dangerous is anthrax?

Most people (99%) who get treated early for skin anthrax survive. Without treatment, 20% will die.

Breathing anthrax is more dangerous. Up to half of the people who breathe anthrax will die.

In rare cases, anthrax is found in meat naturally. There is a 25% - 50% chance of dying from eating this infected meat. Someone could add anthrax to food to infect the people who eat it.

What are the symptoms?

Skin anthrax produces a small, itchy bump (usually on the face, hands or arms) that turns into a blister. The blister becomes an open sore that is black in the middle.

If you breathe anthrax, at first you could feel like you have a cold or flu, but with no runny nose. You may have a sore throat, mild fever and muscle aches, followed by a cough, shortness of breath, chest discomfort, and tiredness.

Anthrax from infected meat causes nausea, loss of hunger, bloody diarrhea, fever, and bad stomach pain.

When do the symptoms start?

For all 3 kinds of anthrax, symptoms can start within 7 days of contact.

If you breathe anthrax, symptoms may begin within a week, or may not start for over a month.

What would an anthrax attack look like?

In most cases in the past, anthrax has been found in the form of a white powder. If you find an unknown white powder in your mail or other place, follow these steps:
• Do not touch or sniff the powder.
• Tell others not to go near the powder.
• Wash your hands.
• Call your local fire or police department.

What if I think I was exposed to anthrax?

Call your doctor or hospital right away.

Is there a vaccine?

Yes, however there is only enough vaccine for people who are exposed to anthrax and people who have high-risk jobs, such as military personnel and health workers.

For more information...

Call CDC for help in English or Spanish:
800-CDC-INFO (800-232-4636)
888-232-6348 (TTY)

Or visit: www.cdc.gov/anthrax
www.dhs.ca.gov/epo