

BIOTERRORISM

Facts and Information

provided by:



in collaboration with:

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Provena Saint Joseph Hospital
Rush-Copley Medical Center
Sherman Hospital*

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If you think you've come in contact with a harmful biologic agent, a suspicious package or letter:

- Do not open suspicious mail
- Do not shake or empty the contents
- Carefully place the package or envelope on the nearest flat surface
- Leave the room, close the door and turn off ventilation system or fans
- Wash hands with soap and water
- If at home, report to local police by dialing **911**
- If at work, report to local police by dialing **911** and notify building security or area supervisor

Bioterrorism Resources & Contact Numbers

For additional information about bioterrorism, visit the Kane County Health Department website at www.kanehealth.com, call us at 630-208-3801, or contact your personal physician.

Other sources of information:

Illinois Department of Public Health:
217-782-7860 or www.idph.state.il.us
Centers for Disease Control: 1-888-246-2675
(English), 1-888-246-2857 (Spanish)
or www.bt.cdc.gov
United States Post Office: 1-800-275-8777 or
www.usps.com
U.S. Department of Health and Human
Services: 1-800-872-6367 or www.hhs.gov

ONE WORD OF CAUTION

Many of the symptoms involving exposure to unknown biologic agents mimic influenza, which is far more common. Therefore, if you cannot tie your symptoms to an exposure event, do not immediately assume those symptoms are the result of bioterrorism.

Frequently Asked Questions About Bioterrorism

What is Bioterrorism?

The term "bioterrorism" refers to the use of an infectious agent to threaten or harm human or animal life.

Examples include receiving a letter tainted with a possible infectious agent or getting a threatening phone call about using such an agent as a weapon.

Use or threatened use of a biologic agent as a weapon is a federal crime and will be thoroughly investigated by the police and FBI.

How will I know if I have been exposed to a hazardous biologic agent?

Exposure is typically tied to some sort of suspect event, i.e. opening a letter containing an unidentified powder. Because different organisms and toxins may be used as biologic agents, suspect materials must be collected for laboratory testing.

Testing will enable identification of the presence of hazardous biologic agent(s) or toxin(s). The results will be discussed with all exposed persons as soon as they are available.

What happens if I get sick before test results of my potential exposure are back?

You should contact your personal physician and follow the physician's advice. If unable to reach a physician, contact a hospital emergency department.

What kind of treatment will I be given?

Doctors will follow the Centers for Disease Control guidelines for treatment or preventive therapy, based on test results.

If I am infected, will I be contagious?

Some biologic agents/toxins are contagious human to human; others are not. See inside information for specifics.

ANTHRAX FACTS

What is anthrax?

Anthrax is a bacterial disease which can infect all warm blooded animals, including humans. It usually affects the skin (**cutaneous** anthrax) but may also involve the respiratory (**inhalation** anthrax) and intestinal (**gastrointestinal** anthrax) tracts.

How is anthrax spread?

Getting anthrax from another person is rare. It is generally spread through one of the following ways:

- **Cutaneous** – Infection occurs when people touch contaminated animal products like wool, bone, hair or hide and the bacteria enters via a cut or scratch in the skin.
- **Inhalation** – infection occurs when people breathe in the spores of the bacteria
- **Gastrointestinal** – Infection occurs when people eat infected meat.

What are the symptoms of anthrax?

- **Cutaneous** – First, the exposed skin itches. Then a large boil-like sore appears. The sore becomes a black scab. If not treated, the infection can spread to the lymph nodes and bloodstream.
- **Inhalation** – First, cold or flu-like symptoms appear. Symptoms can worsen, resulting in serious breathing problems, even death.
- **Gastrointestinal** – Symptoms include fever, abdominal pain, loose/watery bowel movements and blood in the vomit.

How soon after exposure do symptoms occur?

Most symptoms occur within 7 days. However, symptoms may occur up to 60 days after exposure.

How is anthrax diagnosed?

Anthrax is diagnosed through laboratory testing.

What is the treatment for anthrax?

Anthrax is treated with antibiotics.

SMALLPOX FACTS

What is smallpox?

Smallpox is a serious disease caused by a virus which was eradicated worldwide in 1977.

How is smallpox spread?

Smallpox is easily spread from person to person when someone breathes in droplets that an infected person produces via coughing, sneezing or talking. Also contact with an infected person's skin rash can spread the disease.

What are the symptoms of smallpox?

At first, people have flu-like symptoms which can last for 2 to 4 days and include high fever, chills, headache, joint and muscle pain (especially backache). Severe abdominal pain and mental confusion are also symptomatic. A skin rash appears next which is generally worse around the eyes, nose, mouth, palms of the hand and soles of the feet. The rash then forms raised blisters that fill with pus. The blisters burst, dry and crust over. It takes about two weeks before the rash scabs over. To prevent spreading the disease to other people, call your doctor on the phone for instructions on what to do.

How soon after exposure do symptoms occur?

The symptoms appear 7 to 17 days after exposure. The average length of time is 10 to 12 days.

How long is someone with smallpox contagious?

Infected people can only infect others once the rash appears. They can continue to spread the disease until all of the crusts have dropped off all blisters (about three weeks).

How is smallpox diagnosed and treated?

Smallpox is diagnosed by laboratory tests. Treatment includes keeping the patient as comfortable as possible by controlling the itching and relieving the pain. →

BOTULISM FACTS

What is botulism?

Botulism is a serious illness caused by a bacterial toxin. Illness may occur when someone eats infected food or breathes in bacteria which has become airborne.

How is botulism spread?

Getting botulism from another person is very rare. You must swallow or breathe in the bacteria.

What are the symptoms of botulism?

Symptoms include blurred vision, drooping eyelids, and/or shortness of breath. If you have eaten infected food, symptoms may also include vomiting, abdominal pain, or loose/watery bowel movements.

How soon after exposure do symptoms occur?

After eating infected food, symptoms typically occur within 12 to 36 hours. With airborne bacteria, symptoms usually occur anywhere from 24 to 72 hours after breathing in the bacteria.

How is botulism diagnosed?

Botulism is diagnosed through laboratory testing.

What is the treatment for botulism?

Botulism is treated using medicines called "antitoxins" which work against the botulism poison and neutralize it.

SMALLPOX, continued

Is there a smallpox vaccine?

Vaccination programs were discontinued because smallpox no longer occurs naturally. Vaccinations received years ago may no longer be protective. The Centers for Disease Control has small amounts of vaccine available.

PLAGUE FACTS

What is plague?

Plague is a disease caused by bacteria.

What are the symptoms of plague?

Two types of plague are:

- **Bubonic** plague is the most common form. Symptoms include sudden fever, chills, weakness and headache. The **bubo**, a very painful swelling of the lymph node in neck or groin area, appears about the same time as the other symptoms.
- **Pneumonic** plague usually occurs when a bloodstream infection spreads to the lungs. It can also be spread when an infected person or animal with pneumonic disease coughs. Symptoms include sudden fever, chills, cough, chest pain, headache, shortness of breath and cough-up mucous that contains blood or pus. The pneumonia gets worse quickly.

How is plague spread?

Bubonic plague is spread from animal to animal or animal to human through the bite of infected fleas. Animals and rodents with fleas tend to spread the disease by either contracting it themselves or bringing infected fleas into contact with humans.

Pneumonic plague easily spreads from person to person when someone infected with the disease coughs, sneezes or talks and produces airborne droplets which other people then breathe in.

How soon after exposure do symptoms occur?

Bubonic plague symptoms usually occur 2 to 8 days after exposure. **Pneumonic** plague symptoms typically occur within 2 to 3 days following exposure.

How is plague diagnosed?

Plague is diagnosed through laboratory testing.

What is the treatment for plague?

Plague is treated with antibiotics.