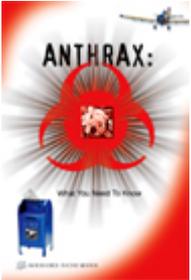


ANTHRAX: What You Need to Know

By ACSH Staff — October 1, 2003



[1] **Executive Summary**

In the post-Sept. 11 era of terrorism, the federal government has placed great emphasis on the potential threat posed by smallpox as a biological weapon. This stress on smallpox, however, raises a serious question: Are other, perhaps more serious bioterrorism agents - particularly anthrax - being given the attention they deserve?

Anthrax, in many respects, is an ideal bioweapon.

It lends itself to aerosolization; its spores can be modified to "the ideal size" for causing lung infection; and the spores resist decontamination and persist in the environment for long periods of time. Further, the effective dispersion of an easily transportable quantity of anthrax spores could have the same devastating effect on a concentrated urban population as a nuclear device.

We therefore neglect the threat of anthrax at our peril. Weaponized anthrax could be disseminated over a large city by a piloted aircraft or unmanned drone equipped with spraying equipment. A spraying device also could be concealed in a moving vehicle or placed in a central location. Anthrax could even be spread throughout a building via its ventilation system.

We have seen, with the anthrax-laced letters of 2001, that anthrax can even be spread through the mail. Food, too, could be contaminated. Water contamination probably presents less of a risk, but neither threat can be ruled out. Early detection and treatment are key to survival following an anthrax attack. Otherwise, the disease, especially the inhalational form, is often fatal.

Ciprofloxacin hydrochloride is the recommended initial antibiotic treatment for anthrax, although other antibiotics (e.g., doxycycline) are also effective when administered early on. There is also a licensed vaccine that is both safe and effective, but because it requires multiple doses over a prolonged period of time, an even better one is needed.

The Bush administration's Project Bioshield intends to make new vaccines available quickly and also find new treatments and vaccines for a variety of bioterror agents, including anthrax. [Anthrax: What You Need to Know](#) [2]

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[anthrax](#) ^[3]

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[2] <https://www.acsh.org/sites/default/files/38769814-Anthrax-What-You-Need-to-Know.pdf>

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