



Sedgwick County...
working for you

Health Department

FACTS & details

about Sedgwick County Government

Anthrax

December 2013

What is Anthrax?

Anthrax is a serious, infectious disease caused by the spore-forming bacterium *Bacillus anthracis*. There are three types of anthrax:

- Cutaneous (skin) anthrax occurs when a spore enters the skin through a cut or an abrasion. This form of anthrax is the most common.
- Gastrointestinal (digestive) anthrax is contracted when contaminated food is eaten, primarily meat from an animal that died of the disease.
- Inhalation (lung) anthrax is contracted by breathing in airborne anthrax spores.
- Injection anthrax is a newly discovered type of anthrax. This type of anthrax has been seen in Northern Europe in people injecting heroin. So far, no cases of injection anthrax have been reported in the US.

How do you get anthrax?

A person can become infected with anthrax by handling products from infected animals or inhaling anthrax spores from contaminated animal products. Anthrax can also be spread by eating undercooked meat from infected animals. It is rare to find infected animals in the United States. Anthrax is not known to spread from one person to another person. Anthrax can be used as a bioterrorist weapon.

What are the symptoms of anthrax?

The symptoms of anthrax are different depending on the type of the disease.

- Cutaneous (skin) anthrax: 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.
- Gastrointestinal (digestive) anthrax: The first symptoms are nausea, loss of appetite, bloody diarrhea and fever, followed by stomach pain.
- Inhalation (lung) anthrax: The first symptoms of inhalation anthrax are cold or flu-like symptoms and can include a sore throat, mild fever and

muscle aches. Later symptoms include cough, chest discomfort, shortness of breath, and tiredness. Do not assume that just because a person has cold or flu symptoms that they have inhalation anthrax.

- Injection anthrax symptoms can include fever, chills, a group of small blisters or bumps that may itch, appearing where the drug was injected. Then a painless skin sore with a black center appears after the blisters or bumps. Symptoms are similar to those of cutaneous anthrax but injection anthrax can spread throughout the body faster.

How quickly do symptoms of anthrax develop?

For all four types of anthrax, symptoms can appear within seven days of coming in contact with the bacterium. For inhalation, symptoms can appear within one week or can take up to 42 days to appear.

How is anthrax treated?

If a person has been exposed to anthrax but is not yet sick, medications will be used to prevent anthrax infection. If a person has become sick since contact with anthrax, the person should seek emergency care, which includes intravenous medications. Success depends on the type of anthrax and how quickly treatment begins.

What is Sedgwick County doing to protect the community from anthrax?

Citizens look to local government for answers on how to be safe and respond to incidents in the community. Sedgwick County is leading a coordinated effort through the Health Department to assure the health and safety of its citizens in the event of a terrorist incident.

For More Information:

Contact the Sedgwick County
Health Department Epidemiology Office at
316-660-7392 or visit the Sedgwick County website at
www.sedgwickcounty.org.