

Anthrax

Agent: *Bacillus anthracis* (spore-forming bacteria)

Mode of Transmission: Through direct contact with contaminated animal products; ingestion of contaminated, undercooked meat; and inhalation of spores during risky industrial practices (e.g., processing wool or hides) or through an intentional bioterrorism release.

Signs/Symptoms: There are three recognized forms of anthrax. The form that develops is dependent on the route of exposure. Cutaneous anthrax presents as a skin lesion that often develops a black scab. Symptoms of abdominal distress (e.g., nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, fever) are present in intestinal anthrax. Symptoms of inhalation anthrax are initially nonspecific, (e.g., fever, cough, chest pain) but will lead to respiratory distress and death if untreated.

Prevention: Minimize contact with infected animals and animal products. A vaccine is available to immunize high-risk individuals.

Other Important Information: Person-to-person transmission is very rare. The incubation period, or time from exposure to onset of symptoms, ranges from 1 to 60 days. Anthrax is classified as a potential bioweapon because it can cause serious public health problems, be spread across a large area, and require extensive planning to protect the public's health.

No cases of anthrax were reported in Virginia during 2008. In 2001, two Virginia residents were reported with inhalation anthrax from an intentional release of *Bacillus anthracis* spores through the U.S. Postal Service. Both individuals were exposed at their workplace and both survived. These were the first reported cases of anthrax in Virginia since 1970.