



THE REPUBLIC OF UGANDA
MINISTRY OF HEALTH

ANTHRAX

DISEASE



TALKING POINTS

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DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH PROMOTION, EDUCATION & COMMUNICATION

Preamble

- » Anthrax is a serious infectious disease caused by a bacteria and it naturally occurs in soil.
- » Anthrax commonly affects domestic and wild animals around the world.
- » However, people can get sick with anthrax if they come in contact with infected animals or contaminated animal products.
- » Anthrax can cause severe illness and death in both humans and animals. However, there are medicines that can treat it.

What is ANTHRAX?

Anthrax is a serious infectious disease caused by bacteria known as *Bacillus anthracis*. The bacteria that causes anthrax can be found naturally in soil and commonly affect domestic and wild animals around the world. Cattle and sheep are highly susceptible and can have severe disease, including sudden death without prior signs of illness. Horses have severe disease with signs for 2 to 3 days before death.

The incubation period in livestock is typically 3 to 7 days (range 1 to 14 days).

How is Anthrax transmitted in animals?

- » Animals can become infected when they ingest spores from contaminated soil, plants, or water.
- » Spores form when bacteria in blood or body fluids from dead animals are exposed to air, or when dead animals are opened by scavengers.
- » The spores begin to form 4 to 10 hours after death, and the process of sporulation is complete within 24 to 48 hours. These spores are very hardy and they contaminate the soil, where they can survive for many years. Vegetative cells within an intact carcass will be outcompeted by other bacteria and die within 2 to 3 days.

Signs of Anthrax in animals

- » Animals with anthrax are distressed, lose appetite, have difficulty breathing, have high fever and often ooze blood from body openings following death.
- » Death is usually sudden and may happen unnoticed.

How humans become infected with Anthrax

People get anthrax when spores get into their bodies. This can be by:

- » Getting into contact with infected animals or contaminated animal products.
- » Breathing in spores.
- » Eating food or drinking water that is contaminated with spores.
- » Getting spores in a cut or scrape in the skin.
- » Participating in butchering an animal that died of anthrax or contact with contaminated animal products such as meat, hide, blood or hair.

When it is in your body, the bacteria can multiply, spread out in the body, produce toxins (poisons), cause severe illness and may result in death if untreated. The incubation period in people ranges from 1 day to more than 2 months.

Signs and symptoms of Anthrax in humans.

- » A clump of small blisters or lumps that may itch, swell, and eventually develop into an ulcer with a black center; the lesion may be painless and is often located on the face, neck, arm, or hands.
- » Fever/chills, fatigue, nausea/vomiting, and abdominal pain are common
- » Incubation period: up to 17 days, but most disease occurs in 1 to 7 days
- » Exposure: butchering an animal that died of anthrax or contact with contaminated animal products such as meat, hide, blood, or hair

Prevention of Anthrax in the community

- » Do not butcher an animal that died of anthrax or get into contact with contaminated animal products such as meat, hide, blood, or hair
- » Do not eat or directly touch dead animals.

NOTE: It has been noted that hand washing can reduce the risk of contracting Anthrax.

Treatment for Anthrax patients

- » All types of anthrax infection can be treated with antibiotics. Doctors will determine whether oral or intravenous and how many antibiotics are needed based on the patient's history and physical exam.
- » Another option for treatment is the use of anthrax antitoxin. Antitoxins target anthrax toxins in the body, but must be administered in conjunction with antibiotics.
- » Patients with severe illness of anthrax may need hospitalization and may require aggressive treatment, including fluid drainage, blood pressure support, and mechanical assistance with breathing.

How to protect animals during outbreaks.

- » Vaccinate all herds in the area especially those without cases.
- » Treat all the sick and exposed animals with antibiotics as prescribed by your veterinarian followed by vaccination after 2 weeks post completion of antibiotics
- » Separate all sick animals from the healthy ones on the farm
- » Avoid moving of animals from farm to farm.

What should be done to animals found dead?

- » Bury any carcass of an animal that dies suddenly on the farm, at least 6 feet deep. Burial should be made under close supervision of a veterinarian.
- » Dead animals must not be open/slaughtered or left to decay on the ground or near a water source.

How a sick or exposed animal should be handled

- » Report any sick or dead animal to the relevant local authority.
- » Sick animals should be separated from the healthy ones on the farm.
- » Treat with antibiotics as prescribed by a veterinary staff if the animal is still alive including those which are exposed

What should I do to avoid getting infected with Anthrax?

- » Do not skin any animal suspected to be sick or to have died from anthrax.
- » Do not eat meat from such animal.
- » Always wash your hands with soap and clean water before and after handling animals.
- » Report any suspicious case to the authorities (Local councils, Park Rangers, Veterinary or Health staff nearest you).
- » If a person feels sick after touching or eating meat from a sick or dead animal, contact the nearest health facility immediately.
- » If it is suspected that someone in the family may have contracted the disease, immediately take the person to the nearest health facility.

Who is more at risk of contracting the anthrax disease?

- » Generally, people who handle animals and animal products like slaughterers, herdsman, veterinarians, livestock producers, traders, consumers, travellers and people in industry are at risk when they come in contact with the spores of Anthrax.

Drinking milk during an Anthrax outbreak

- » It is ok for people to continue to drink milk as long as it is boiled. Drinking raw animal milk is totally discouraged.

Key Messages

- » Anthrax is a serious infectious disease caused by bacteria which is naturally found in the soil. It affects both animals and humans.
- » Immediately report any sudden animal deaths to the local veterinary officer.
- » Avoid contact with dead animals and immediately report any sudden animal deaths to the local veterinary officer.
- » Don't get into contact with dead animals
- » Avoid Eating meat from animals that have died suddenly or meat from unknown sources.
- » Do not eat sick or dead animals
- » Report any sick or dead animal to the relevant local authority.
- » You cannot catch Anthrax from another person the way you might catch a cold or flu.

For more information, contact your nearest District
Veterinary Office or District Health Office or
Call the Ministry of Health Toll free line:
0800 100066 or send SMS U-Report on 8500.