

# RESPONDING TO THE RECEIPT OF ENVELOPES OR PACKAGES SUSPECTED TO CONTAIN ANTHRAX

The purpose of these guidelines is to recommend procedures for handling such incidents at home or at the workplace. Decisions about the need for decontamination and initiation of antibiotics should be made by health officials responsible for the jurisdiction in which the incident occurs. In most circumstances, the decision of whether to initiate antibiotics can be delayed until the presence or absence of anthrax bacteria or spores is determined by the State Public Health Laboratory. State and local health department officials may be involved in the decision-making process when a potential exposure has occurred. A risk-assessment for those persons involved in the incident should also be coordinated by law enforcement personnel.

## *What You Should Know About Anthrax*

- Anthrax organisms can cause skin infection, gastrointestinal infection or pulmonary infection. To do so, the organism must be rubbed into abraded skin, swallowed, or inhaled as a fine, aerosolized mist. All forms of disease are generally treatable with antibiotics, if detected in a timely manner. If the exposure was real, symptoms would usually develop within two to six days.
- For anthrax to be effective as a biological agent it must be aerosolized into tiny particles smaller than a red blood cell. This is difficult to do, and requires a great deal of technical skill and special equipment. If these small particles are inhaled, life-threatening lung infection can occur, but prompt recognition and treatment are usually effective.

## *What To Do If You Encounter A Suspicious Letter Or Package - DO NOT PANIC*

### **A Suspicious Unopened Letter**

1. **DO NOT OPEN**
2. **LEAVE** letter on desk or place in a bag, if available
3. **LEAVE** room immediately.
4. **WASH** hands with soap and water.
5. **NOTIFY** your supervisor, who should then notify your local law enforcement agency.
6. If at home, call the local law enforcement agency regarding the letter.

### **Powder Spills Out Of An Envelope**

1. **DO NOT** clean powder up. Keep others away (including pets, if at home).
2. **DO NOT** touch, smell, taste, or otherwise attempt to analyze the substance.
3. **GENTLY** invert a container, such as an empty trash can, **OVER** the envelope and powder to avoid dispersal. The district health department and/or law enforcement officials may encourage sample testing to determine the contents of the powder.
4. **NOTIFY** your supervisor who should contact your local law enforcement agency for further assistance.
5. Avoid the area/room containing the envelope but **REMAIN** on premises and wait for further instructions from your supervisor or emergency responders.
6. Anyone who came in contact with the powder should **WASH** their hands with soap and water immediately.
7. **DO NOT** brush off your clothes.
8. **SHUT OFF** direct air sources or notify someone who can, to avoid unnecessary dispersal (air conditioners, fans, central air, etc...)
9. **MAKE A LIST** of all people who had contact with the powder and a list of your movements after handling the suspicious letter (ex: office cubicle, rest

room, elevator, etc...) and give both lists to the emergency responders. Further medical follow-up for yourself, exposed associates and surface decontamination may be required.

### **Package Marked With Threatening Message**

1. **DO NOT OPEN**, **LEAVE** it and **EVACUATE** the room.
2. **KEEP** others from entering.
3. **NOTIFY** your supervisor who should contact the local police
4. Avoid the area containing the package but remain on premises and wait for further instructions from your supervisor or emergency responders. Further medical follow-up may be required for yourself and exposed associates.

### **Aerosolization, Small Explosion, Or Letter Stating "Anthrax In Ventilation System"**

1. If a letter is involved, **PLACE ENVELOPE** in plastic bag, if available, or leave envelope on desk.
2. **LEAVE** room immediately and secure entry.
3. **NOTIFY** your supervisor, who should contact the local police.
4. **SHUT** down air handling system or contact someone that can.
5. **REMAIN** outside, but near premises until responders arrive to make sure that all potentially exposed persons are accounted for.
6. **MAKE** a list of all people who were in your work area at the time of the threat and give the list to the emergency responders. Further medical follow-up may be required for yourself and exposed associates.

### **Characteristics of Suspicious Letters or Packages include:**

- Excessive postage
- Handwritten or poorly typed addresses
- Incorrect titles
- Title, but no name
- Misspellings of common words
- Oily stains, discolorations, or odor
- No return address
- Excessive weight
- Lopsided or uneven envelope
- Protruding wires or aluminum foil
- Excessive security material (e.g., masking tape, string)
- Visual distractions
- Ticking sound
- Marked with restrictive endorsements (e.g., “Personal” or “Confidential”)
- Postmark with city /state not matching return address