

**PENNSYLVANIA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH  
HEALTH ALERT #11**

**Date:** October 13, 2001  
**Subject:** Update: Anthrax in New York City  
**To:** Health Alert Network  
**From:** Robert S. Zimmerman, Jr.  
Secretary of Health

**HOSPITALS: Please share this Alert with All Medical, Pediatric, Nursing, Laboratory, Radiology and Pharmacy Staff in Your Hospital.**

The following information has been provided by the New York City Health Department:

**Case of cutaneous anthrax in New York City:** On October 12, the New York City Department of Health was notified by the Centers for Disease Control that a specimen from a skin lesion was positive for *Bacillus anthracis* by immunohistochemical stain. The patient is also serology positive.

The specimen was from a 38 year-old woman who worked at 30 Rockefeller Center in Manhattan, who developed a skin lesion, which was initially papular, then vesicular, then necrotic. The patient has been on Ciprofloxacin and the skin lesion is healing. She is well and was never hospitalized.

The source of anthrax exposure is still being investigated but it is possible it may have occurred when opening an envelope containing a powdery substance on September 25, or another a week earlier in September. Other individuals who handled this letter are being evaluated for possible exposure. As the exposure occurred at least 3 weeks ago, and as the symptoms of an anthrax infection most often develop within seven days of exposure, the likelihood of other cases related to this incident is very low.

The powdery substance in the envelope was tested at the NYC DOH and the CDC laboratories. The powder has tested negative for *B. anthracis* by direct microscopy, Gram stain, culture, DFA, and PCR; however, only limited amounts of the substance were available for testing. CDC is doing further testing.

While the risk of anthrax among other employees and visitors to the building where these individuals work is extremely low, as a precautionary measure DOH personnel will evaluate individuals to assess the need for antibiotic prophylaxis for those who were in close proximity to the potential source of exposure.

NYC DOH does NOT recommend antibiotic prophylaxis or routine anthrax testing for visitors or other individuals who have worked on floors of the building other than the 3rd floor, 7<sup>th</sup> floor, or in the mailroom.

If health care providers have questions or concerns, they may call the New York City Department of Health at 1-866-692-3641 (within NYC) or 1-212-788-4973 (outside NYC). **This hotline telephone number is for employees at 30 Rockefeller Plaza and physicians only.**

The following advice from the U. S. Postal Service may be of use in answering mail handling questions:

**What Should I do if I Receive an Anthrax Threat by Mail?**

- *Do not handle the mail piece or package suspected of contamination.*
- Notify your supervisor, who will immediately contact the Inspection Service, local police, safety office or designated person.
- Make sure that damaged or suspicious packages are isolated and the immediate area cordoned off.
- Ensure that all persons who have touched the mail piece wash their hands with soap and water.
- The Inspectors will collect the mail, assess the threat situation and coordinate with the FBI.
- Designated officials will notify local, county, and state health departments.
- Designated officials will notify the state emergency manager.
- List all persons who have touched the letter and/or envelope. Include contact information. Provide the list to the Inspection Service.
- Place all items worn when in contact with the suspected mail piece in plastic bags and keep them wherever you change your clothes and have them available for law enforcement agents.
- As soon as practical, shower with soap and water.
- If prescribed medication by medical personnel, take it until otherwise instructed or it runs out.

For USPS updates check their website at:

<http://www.usps.com/news/2001/press/serviceupdates.htm>.

This information is current as of 2 pm, October 12, 2001, but may be modified in the future. We will continue to post updated information regarding the most common questions about this subject as well as the latest information on our preparedness efforts.

If you need further information, please call 1- 877-PA-HEALTH.