



**PENNSYLVANIA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
HEALTH ALERT #18**

Date: October 29, 2001
Subject: Update: Anthrax exposures in postal and other mailroom facilities
To: Health Alert Network
From: Robert S. Zimmerman, Jr., MPH
Secretary of Health

**HOSPITALS: PLEASE SHARE THIS WITH ALL MEDICAL, PEDIATRIC, NURSING,
LABORATORY, RADIOLOGY & PHARMACY STAFF IN YOUR HOSPITAL**

PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS: DISTRIBUTE TO YOUR MEMBERSHIP

Washington, D.C.:

From the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:

An ongoing investigation has identified a total of 5 mailroom employees with inhalational anthrax from two mailroom facilities (US Postal Service Washington DC Processing and Distribution Center at 900 Brentwood Road, NE, Washington; and Department of State Annex 32 mailroom facility) in the greater Washington DC Metropolitan area (Maryland, Virginia, and District of Columbia). Preliminary environmental sampling has also revealed contamination in mailrooms serving the Central Intelligence Agency, House of Representatives, Supreme Court, Walter Reed Army Institute of Research (WRAIR), and White House, and in the Southwest Postal Station. This is in addition to previous reports of contamination in the mailroom serving the Hart Senate Building, related to a *Bacillus anthracis*-laden letter received by a Senator.

No cases of inhalational or cutaneous anthrax have been reported among customers who entered any US Postal facility to purchase stamps or conduct other postal business.

The **CDC continues to recommend that all people who have been in the non-public, mail operations areas of the Brentwood and State Department facilities** (the two facilities with inhalation anthrax cases) **since October 11, 2001, receive 60-days of prophylaxis for potential exposure to anthrax.** These facilities remain closed pending the results of comprehensive environmental sampling and determination of requisite remediation. In addition, **the mail facilities that supply the CIA, House office buildings, Supreme Court, Walter Reed Army Institute of Research, White House, and Southwest postal facilities** (with confirmed environmental swabs for *B anthracis*) **have been closed for remediation. All workers in those buildings should complete a 60-day course of prophylaxis.**

Health authorities in the Metropolitan Washington area, based on the Postal Service's mailstream flow, also recommend **prophylaxis for all personnel who have worked, since October 11, 2001, in the non-public, mail operations areas at any postal facility or unique private mailroom that receives incoming mail directly from the Brentwood facility.** While these facilities may remain open, their **employees should immediately receive 10 days of prophylaxis.** **Final recommendations regarding the completion of a full 60-days of prophylaxis will be forthcoming based on a careful risk assessment** from environmental sampling from a portion of these facilities and from other clinical and epidemiologic data. Additionally, a set of protocols is being developed for facility managers in these and other facilities for the collection of environmental samples in their own facilities.

Results of the anti-microbial susceptibility profiles from Washington DC *B. anthracis* isolates, as well as prior CDC guidelines, support the use of doxycycline as the drug of choice for prophylaxis, both for newly identified individuals and for completion of the course in those previously started on ciprofloxacin.

A number of drug distribution sites have been established in the Washington DC Metropolitan area for persons in the above groups as listed below. Persons may also contact the Maryland and Virginia Health Departments for the sites of additional prophylaxis facilities. Times and places are subject to change. Those persons outside the Washington DC Metropolitan area should contact their state or local health department and seek treatment from their private physician.

Trenton, New Jersey:

From the New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services:

An ongoing investigation has identified a total of five patients with suspect or confirmed anthrax among Trenton-area postal employees: 2 confirmed and 1 suspect cutaneous and 1 confirmed and 1 suspect inhalational anthrax.

Environmental sampling tests conducted by the New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services (DHSS) the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and crime scene sampling by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) were all negative in Cartaret, Downtown Station on Montgomery St. in Trenton, Princeton Main, West Windsor, and Ewing Township postal facilities. Thirty-four of 102 samples taken at the Route 130 mail processing center in Hamilton Township were positive; all 20 samples taken from public areas of this facility are negative.

All but 60 of the approximately 1,200 postal workers from the Route 130 Mail Processing Center in Hamilton Township who initially visited the occupational health clinic at Robert Wood Johnson University Medical Center at Hamilton have returned to receive an antibiotic re-fill according to hospital administrators.

The DHSS, in coordination with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and St. Francis Medical Center, opened today a clinic in the Crean Hall Auditorium in the School of Nursing at St. Francis Medical Center on 601 Hamilton Avenue in Trenton. The clinic will continue through Thursday from 8:00 a.m. - 9:00 p.m. The clinic is providing antibiotic treatment for all people who went into the non-public workplace areas of the West Trenton and Route 130 Hamilton Mail Processing Facilities where bulk mail is picked up. **Sixty days of antibiotic treatment are recommended to all postal workers and persons going into the workplace areas of the West Trenton and Hamilton facilities since September 18 even if they have received a negative nasal swab result.**

New York City:

From the New York City Health Department:

Although no cases of anthrax have been identified among New York City postal workers, **the US Postmaster General has also decided to offer antibiotic prophylaxis to employees at the NYC postal sites that handled the contaminated letters postmarked September 18th that were delivered to NBC and the *New York Post*. These sites include the **Morgan Central Processing Center on 30th Street between Ninth and Tenth Avenues**, as well as the following postal facilities: **the James A. Farley, Times Square, Radio City Music Hall, Ansonia and Rockefeller Center. Postal employees from these sites should be referred to their employers to obtain more detailed information on where to receive medications.** Laboratory investigations are currently being conducted to assess for environmental contamination, especially in the mail sorting area at the Morgan Processing Center.**

If you treat any postal workers or visitors to postal facilities from New York City, or the Trenton, NJ or Washington, DC metropolitan areas with anthrax exposure or symptoms consistent with anthrax, please contact the Pennsylvania Department of Health at (877) PA HEALTH so that we can forward the information to the health authorities in these areas.

This information is current as of 2 pm, October 29, 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.