

PENNSYLVANIA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
HEALTH ALERT #21

Date: November 16, 2001
Subject: Update: Postexposure Prophylaxis Recommendations for Anthrax
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

Pennsylvania:

Except for the Bucks County resident with cutaneous anthrax who works at the Hamilton Township, New Jersey postal facility, there have been NO additional confirmed cases of anthrax illness anywhere in the Commonwealth.

An increased index of suspicion should be maintained for anthrax among persons in higher risk groups, based on the epidemiology of the recent intentional anthrax cases in the United States. These include postal workers (*especially postal employees who work in mail distribution centers where automated sorting machines are located*), persons who work for government agencies, media corporations or other high profile companies/institutions (*especially if they handle mail*), and persons who have had a potential risk exposure - such as, aerosolization of powder when opening or handling a powder-containing envelope that is deemed to be a credible threat (*e.g., addressed to a high-profile person or corporation, or if the letter contains a written threat*). However, as the epidemiology of the outbreak may be evolving, it is also essential that any patient with a clinical syndrome suggestive of anthrax be reported immediately to the PADOH at 877-PA-HEALTH and your local health department, if any, regardless of whether they are in a high-risk group.

New Jersey:

From the New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services:

Bellmawr Mail Distribution Center:

A Delaware resident who works at the Bellmawr Mail Distribution Center was listed as a suspected cutaneous anthrax case by CDC on Oct. 31. Approximately 100 samples were collected Oct. 31. One of the FBI samples is positive through final testing. All other FBI, DHSS and CDC samples taken are negative through final testing. **Although not recommended** by DHSS and CDC, **workers at the facility were offered 10 days of antibiotics.**

Kuser Road Office Building:

A Kuser Road (Hamilton) office worker was listed as a confirmed cutaneous anthrax case by CDC on Oct 29. Sampling was conducted Oct. 30. One FBI sample from an in-office mail bin was reported positive on Nov. 2. All other FBI, DHSS and CDC samples are negative through final testing. The DHSS and CDC **did not recommend that the office be closed.** The area around where the positive sample was collected has been cleaned. **Although not recommended** by DHSS and CDC, **employees were offered 10 days of antibiotics** pending final test results.

Princeton Main, West Windsor: 23 samples taken Oct. 27 are negative through final testing. 22 samples taken Oct. 27 are negative and one sample is positive through final testing. Additional environmental samples were collected Oct. 30 and all are negative through final testing. The area around where the positive sample was collected has been cleaned. **Although not recommended** by DHSS and CDC, **workers were offered 10 days of antibiotics.**

Carteret Facility: All 14 samples taken Oct. 24 are negative for anthrax through final testing. The DHSS and CDC has informed the facility manager to advise **workers and business visitors to stop taking antibiotics** that had been given as a precautionary measure.

Route 130 Mail Processing Facility, Hamilton Township: Four employees of this facility have been diagnosed with anthrax (2 cutaneous, 2 inhalational). 34 out of 102 samples taken are positive for anthrax through final testing.

West Trenton facility, Ewing Twp.: A mail carrier from this post office has been diagnosed with cutaneous anthrax. All 22 samples taken Oct. 25 are negative for anthrax through final testing. All 20 samples taken Oct. 19 and analyzed at the United States Army Medical Research Institute of Infectious Disease (USAMRIID) are negative for anthrax through final testing.

The approximately 1,300 nasal swab tests done on workers from the Hamilton and West Trenton postal facilities are all negative through final testing. The nasal swabs were taken by DHSS, CDC and Robert Wood Johnson University Medical Center-Hamilton. A negative nasal swab test does not mean that a person has not been exposed to anthrax, and **individuals from Hamilton and West Trenton are urged to continue their antibiotic treatment.**

New York City:

From the New York City Department of Health:

An extensive environmental and epidemiologic investigation was conducted at **Manhattan Eye Ear and Throat Hospital** last week. On November 2, the NYCDOH announced that all environmental and nasal swab testing was negative, and there was no evidence that the hospital was the site of exposure for this patient. Therefore, the NYCDOH is advising that **all employees, patients, and visitors who were started on preventive antibiotic therapy discontinue their medication.**

On October 24, the U.S. Postal Service began giving antibiotics to about 7000 employees at six NYC facilities (Morgan Facility, James A. Farley Station, Ansonia Station, Times Square Station, Rockefeller Center Station and Radio City Station). Although the risk of inhalational anthrax is low in facilities where contaminated letters may have passed through, antibiotics were given as a precaution. These six facilities were tested for the presence of anthrax spores and employees were evaluated for any illnesses due to anthrax.

Although no illnesses due to anthrax have been identified among postal workers in NYC, anthrax spores have been found at several areas in the Morgan Facility. These spores may pose a very low risk for disease among employees at this facility. To minimize the risk of inhalational anthrax among workers, the CDC has recommend that **all employees who have worked on 2 South and 3 South of the Morgan Facility since October 9th keep taking antibiotics for a total of 60 days.**

There is no evidence of anthrax contamination at the other five sites tested. Therefore, CDC has recommended that **all employees at the James A. Farley Station, Ansonia Station, Times Square Station, Rockefeller Center Station and Radio City Station stop taking antibiotics.**

This information is current as of 2 pm, November 5, 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.