

Anthrax

Definition:

Anthrax is caused by the bacteria *Bacillus anthracis*. Individuals become infected with anthrax when anthrax spores get inside the body and are activated. Once active, the spores produce toxins and multiply throughout the body.

Signs and symptoms:

Symptoms depend on the method of transmission and can occur between 1 day and 2 months after transmission. Symptoms may include but are not limited to: fever, chills, painless skin sores with black centers, blisters, joint and muscle aches, shortness of breath, swelling of neck or neck glands, weakness, extreme tiredness, diarrhea, vomiting, and stomach pain.

Transmission:

Transmission can occur through spores that enter the skin (cutaneous), spores that are ingested (gastrointestinal), by breathing in spores (inhalation), or through contaminated injections. It is not known to spread from person to person.

Diagnosis:

Anthrax is diagnosed via laboratory testing performed at designated laboratories.

Role of the School Nurse:

Prevention

- When students plan to travel internationally, review guidance for avoiding contact with infected animal carcasses, hides (drums made with animal skins), or eating meat from recently slaughtered sick animals.
- There is a vaccine licensed to prevent anthrax, but it is only recommended for routine use in certain groups of at-risk adults (mainly military personnel).

Treatment Recommendations

- If symptoms are noted, notify law enforcement and seek medical attention immediately at a hospital.
- Treatment includes antibiotics and antitoxins as determined by a medical provider.

Exclusions

- There are no exclusions indicated.

Reporting Requirements

- Report immediately to 1-800-821-5821

Resources:

- Maine CDC Anthrax website: <http://www.maine.gov/dhhs/mecdc/infectious-disease/epi/airborne/anthrax.shtml>
- Federal CDC Anthrax website: <http://www.cdc.gov/anthrax/>