



THE CITY OF NEW YORK DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

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Information for Employees, Patients, and Those Who Have Visited the Manhattan Eye, Ear and Throat Hospital Since October 11, 2001

What happened at the Manhattan Eye, Ear and Throat Hospital?

Preliminary laboratory tests indicate that an employee who works at the Manhattan Eye, Ear and Throat Hospital, located at 210 East 64th Street, has been infected by anthrax (a type of bacteria) and has developed the inhalational (lung) form of anthrax infection. The employee is hospitalized in serious condition and is being treated with antibiotics and aggressive supportive care. It is not yet known how this patient was exposed to anthrax or whether the patient was exposed at the hospital where she works. This case is being investigated by the New York City Department of Health, in conjunction with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and law enforcement authorities.

What is anthrax?

- Anthrax is an infectious disease caused by the bacteria called *Bacillus anthracis*.
- Anthrax infection can occur in three forms depending on the way a person is exposed: cutaneous (skin), inhalational (lung), and gastrointestinal (stomach and intestines).
- Inhalational (lung) infection due to anthrax can occur if the spores are breathed into the lungs. The inhalational form responds well to antibiotics if treatment is started before significant symptoms begin.

How likely is it that I have actually been exposed to anthrax?

Personnel from the New York City Department of Health and CDC will conduct a full environmental and epidemiologic investigation related to this incident. At present we have not identified the likely source of this infection, therefore we are recommending that ***all employees of the Manhattan Eye, Ear and Throat Hospital, as well as patients and visitors who spent at least one hour in the hospital since October 11, 2001*** start antibiotics to prevent inhalational anthrax infection. You may be able to discontinue antibiotics once the results of the environmental and epidemiologic investigations to define those individuals at risk of infection become available.

Should I have a nasal swab to see if I'm infected?

A nasal swab test is being collected from employees who work in the same area as the ill employee to look for any evidence of the anthrax spores. This testing will potentially help us determine the source of the infection. This test is ***not*** a way to determine if an individual has been exposed to anthrax, as a negative nasal swab test result does not completely rule out exposure to anthrax. Therefore, we are recommending that ***all employees of the Manhattan Eye, Ear and Throat Hospital, as well as patients and visitors who spent at least one hour in the hospital since October 11, 2001*** start antibiotics to prevent inhalational anthrax infection. You may be able to discontinue antibiotics once the results of the environmental and epidemiologic investigations to define those individuals at risk of infection become available.

Why am I being given antibiotics?

The only way to prevent or to treat inhalational anthrax infection is to start effective antibiotics before significant symptoms start. At present, our environmental and epidemiological investigation has just been initiated and we do not yet have sufficient information to determine those employees, patients or visitors at the Manhattan Eye, Ear and Throat Hospital who are at risk of anthrax exposure. ***Therefore***, the New York City Department of Health is recommending that ***all employees of the Manhattan Eye, Ear and Throat Hospital, as well as patients and visitors who spent at least one hour in the hospital since October 11, 2001*** start antibiotics to prevent inhalational anthrax infection. You may need to take these antibiotics for a prolonged period of time (60 days). Currently, the New York City Department of Health is dispensing 14-day antibiotic regimens that may be continued or discontinued depending on further epidemiologic, laboratory and environmental investigations.

- **It is extremely important that you take these antibiotics exactly as you are told;** additional information may be given to you along with your antibiotics. Failure to take them as often or for as long as prescribed can result in developing a serious, life-threatening anthrax infection
- **If you develop side effects from the antibiotics, call your health care provider immediately.** Although most side effects are mild, severe side effects may occur, such as diarrhea, abdominal symptoms, rash, and allergic reactions. Depending on the type of side effects, you may be able to continue taking the medicine, or may need to be switched to an alternative antibiotic. Your physician should contact the New York City Department of Health at **1-866-692-3641 (within NYC) or 1-212-788-4973 (outside NYC)** for consultation on possible alternative antibiotics.
- **Because it is possible to develop anthrax infection even when taking antibiotics, you should watch for the following symptoms:**
 - Fever (temperature greater than 100°F)
 - Flu-like symptoms (cough, fatigue, muscle aches), nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea
 - Any rash or sores, especially on your face, arms, or hands
 - **Contact your health care provider and the New York City Department of Health immediately if you develop any of these symptoms. The New York City Department of Health telephone number for this purpose is 1-866-692-3641 (within NYC) or 1-212-788-4973 (outside NYC)**

The Health Department told me I was exposed, but I feel fine. Do I still need to take antibiotics?

Because the risk of infection is at present unknown, the New York City Department of Health is recommending that that *all employees of the Manhattan Eye, Ear and Throat Hospital, as well as patients and visitors who spent at least one hour in the hospital since October 11, 2001* start antibiotics to prevent inhalational anthrax infection. You may be able to discontinue the antibiotics once the results of further environmental and epidemiologic investigations become available.

Should people who are not patients, visitors or employees of the Manhattan Eye, Ear and Throat Hospital since October 11, 2001 take antibiotics?

No. Only those persons determined by the New York City Department of Health to be at risk of exposure should take antibiotics. Taking antibiotics unnecessarily can be dangerous. The course of antibiotic treatment to prevent anthrax infection is long (60 days) and many people experience side effects. Although most side effects are mild, severe side effects may occur (such as diarrhea, abdominal symptoms, rash, and allergic reactions) and the use of antibiotics may interfere with other medications. In addition, the inappropriate use of antibiotics may cause the development of antibiotic-resistant strains of common bacteria.

Is anthrax contagious from person to person?

Inhalational (lung) anthrax is not spread from person to person. Even if you develop symptoms of inhalational anthrax, you are not contagious to other persons. If you develop cutaneous (skin) anthrax, the drainage from an open sore presents a *very low* risk of infection to others. The only way cutaneous (skin) anthrax can potentially be transmitted is by *direct* contact with the drainage from an open sore. Anthrax is *not* spread from person to person by casual contact, sharing office space, or by coughing and sneezing.

What should I do with the clothes that I wore to the Manhattan Eye, Ear and Throat Hospital since October 11, 2001?

These clothes do not pose any significant health risk to you. Washing the clothes in the regular laundry will safely remove any possible anthrax spores. You do not need to discard the clothes.

Do my family, sexual contacts or other people I have been in contact with need antibiotics?

No. These individuals do not need antibiotics. As noted above, anthrax typically is not contagious. These individuals are not at risk of exposure.

Who can my health care provider call if I have questions or concerns?

Please call the New York City Department of Health at **1-866-692-3641 (within NYC) or 1-212-788-4973 (outside NYC)**. Individuals can also call the Dept. of Health at **877-817-7621** for questions about anthrax.