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ANTHRAX

Anthrax, a highly infectious and fatal disease of mammals and humans, is caused by a relatively large spore-forming rectangular shaped bacterium called *Bacillus anthracis*. Most outbreaks occur in areas where animals have previously died of anthrax, as the spores remain viable for decades. The predominant sign in cattle with anthrax is a progression from a normal appearance to dead in a matter of hours. Most animals are simply found dead. Once an outbreak begins in the herd animals may be observed with signs of weakness, fever, excitement followed by depression, difficulty breathing, uncoordinated movements and convulsions. Bloody discharges from the natural body openings as well as edema in different parts of the body are sometimes observed. After death, the animal's body rapidly decomposes.


Some animals may be saved if treated very early with penicillin or tetracyclines. Vaccination is very effective in preventing further disease from occurring in animals on a property experiencing an outbreak, however full immunity takes 10 to 14 days to develop. Antibiotics must not be used at the same time as vaccines are given, since they interfere with the development of immunity.

For animals and humans, anthrax is a reportable disease in the United States. Local and state health departments, federal animal health officials, and the CDC's National Center for Infectious Diseases should immediately be notified of any suspected cases. Remember, this is a potentially fatal human pathogen, so appropriate measures must be taken to protect all personnel. A physician should be contacted for the best preventative measures for all exposed or potentially exposed humans.

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