

Several years ago Anthrax was spread by either domestic or foreign terrorists via the U.S. mail. This gives cause for increased concern that other attempts to harass and/or terrorize the public by spreading toxic or other infectious agents among the general population might occur. Although purposeful widespread dissemination of these agents is unlikely, it is possible that some might be released to infect specific targeted individuals or organizations. Thus, the general public and closely associated, non-targeted persons could be inadvertently exposed to extremely virulent or toxic biological agents. These agents are invisible to the naked eye, odorless, tasteless, and non-irritant on immediate contact and thus, cannot be readily detected by our senses. Detection and identification requires sophisticated procedures generally available only to public health and local medical facilities. In most cases, the procedure described in the "hazardous materials - chemical disaster" section (of the Emergency Types menu) are satisfactory to protect you from a confirmed bioterrorist attack. A credible public warning of a bioterrorist attack must necessarily come from official sources such as police, public health services, U.S. military etc. Anthrax is only one of many highly infectious and/or toxic agents that might be used by bioterrorists to spread disease; and possibly even more seriously, the fear of disease, among the general population. Many virulent microbes and toxins can be easily produced in clandestine laboratories. These may be disseminated by a variety of methods; namely: air, food, water, and common vectors such as mail, newsprint, fabrics, and other inanimate objects. If the antidote or antibiotic susceptibility of the suspected infections or toxic agent is known, begin treatment as soon as possible. If vectors such as mail or other inanimate objects carry the harmful agent, the simplest protective measures are to avoid contact with them and then disinfect them, if possible. Common household chlorine bleach will effectively kill most bacteria and viruses, including anthrax spores. However, chlorine bleach is relatively ineffective if the material is heavily contaminated with dirt or organic matter, such as vegetable and animal matter. In this case disinfectants such as Lysol are more effective. If the biological agent is suspected to be air-borne (i.e. Sprayed or dusted) a painter's mask or dry cloth such as a handkerchief, should offer some protection. Increasing the airflow by fans moving air away from yourself and the suspected source of contamination should offer some protection. If water is a suspected source of infection, boiling the water for twenty (20) minutes will destroy most but not all infectious agents and bio-toxins such as botulism toxin. Anthrax spores can sometimes survive twenty (20) minutes in boiling water. If anthrax is suspected, the water should be boiled for at least one (1) hour. Do not bathe or wash any items in suspected contaminated water, then discard by incineration or burying them in soil.

If you believe your body or clothing is contaminated, remove clothing as soon as possible, bathe thoroughly with soap and large amounts of water to dilute and discharge the contaminated to the sewage disposal facility. Continue flushing with fresh water to further dilute the noxious agent. Soak contaminated clothing in maximum strength chlorine bleach for at least one (1) hour. Clothing should be placed in chlorine solution before washing your body to prevent later cross-contamination.

If you are aware of, or suspect a nearby bioterrorist attack, the natural impulse to run away from the source would limit your exposure to the infectious agents and thus, increase your chances for survival. Very few, if any biological agents infect 100% of the people exposed to them. The infection rate is usually dose-dependent and thus as a general rule, the fewer microbes or toxins you are exposed to, the better your chances for survival. In any event, do not panic! Most biological agents require 24 hours or longer before signs of infection appear. This slows adequate time to decontaminate hazardous premises and initiate proper treatment or preventative measures.

For more information on bioterrorism visit the [Center for Disease Control section on bioterrorism](#).