

Anthrax At-A-Glance

DEFINITION	• Anthrax is an acute infection caused by the Gram-positive spore forming bacterium <i>Bacillus anthracis</i>. The spore form of the bacterium allows it to survive in adverse environmental conditions for long time periods most commonly in the soil. It is a natural infection of grazing mammals such as cows, sheep and goats, which become infected through ingestion of soil containing spores. • Human infections usually result from contact with infected animals or animal products. • There are four forms of human disease: Cutaneous, Inhalation (Pulmonary), Ingestion and Injection, depending on how infection was acquired. • Over 95% of naturally occurring cases are cutaneous and occupationally acquired with inoculation of spores into small cuts and abrasions (e.g. during handling of animal hides). This form present with dark sores on the skin. • Anthrax has been used as an agent in bioterrorism (Inhalation). • Injection anthrax –this is seen in heroin users and most likely contracted from using heroin contaminated with anthrax spores. Outbreaks of injectional anthrax among people who inject drugs (PWID) have been reported. See: Guidance for managing anthrax among people who inject drugs • There have been no known cases of person to person transmission of Inhalation (pulmonary) anthrax. • If untreated, the disease can be fatal in 5% of cases, but with prompt antibiotic treatment recovery occurs.
MANAGEMENT	• Standard Infection Prevention and Control Precautions must be used when caring for patients with known or suspected anthrax: appropriate use of PPE and hand washing as per the WHO 5 moments of hand hygiene. • Staff to cover skin abrasions with a waterproof dressing. • Patient's Cutaneous anthrax lesions should be dressed for the first 24-48 hours after treatment • Single room isolation is NOT required • Clinical waste must be disposed of in the normal way. • Linen must be treated as infectious, double bagged in a red alginate bag inside a white linen bag.
CLEANING	• Patient equipment must be cleaned using Clinell RED sporicidal wipes. • Environmental surfaces contaminated with blood or body fluids must be cleaned with Acticlor plus 10000 ppm (4 tablets in 1 litre of water)
ISOLATION	Single room isolation is NOT required For further advice please contact the Infection Prevention and Control Team.