



Bulletin No. 15

October 23, 2001

Responding to Anthrax Threats:

Recommendations for Handling Suspicious Letters and Packages

This bulletin recommends procedures for handling suspicious letters and parcels that could present a risk for exposure to anthrax or other biological hazards. The recommendations presented here summarize information in health alerts broadcast by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on October 12, 2001.

Anthrax is caused by the bacteria *Bacillus anthracis*, which can infect the skin, gastrointestinal system, or lungs. In order to cause infection, the organism must be rubbed into abraded skin, swallowed, or inhaled as a fine, aerosolized mist.

For anthrax to be effective as a covert biological agent, it must be aerosolized into very small particles. This difficult task requires technical skill and special equipment. If small particles are inhaled, a life-threatening lung infection can occur, but early recognition and treatment may prevent death. Anthrax cannot be spread from person to person.

Below are four situations, each with recommended procedures for the handling of suspicious envelopes or packages:

Situation 1: A person receives a suspicious letter or package AND DOES NOT OPEN IT - there is no threatening message or visible powder.

1. PLACE the item into two plastic bags, or COVER the envelope or package with anything (e.g., clothing, paper, trashcan, etc.) and do not remove this cover.
2. WASH hands and face with SOAP and WATER.
3. NOTIFY local law enforcement. Law enforcement will assure proper custody of the letter or package. The need for laboratory testing will be evaluated.

Situation 2: A person receives a letter or package with a threatening message such as "ANTHRAX" - there is no visible powder.

1. DO NOT SHAKE or OPEN IT
2. PLACE the item in two plastic bags, or COVER the envelope or package with anything (e.g., clothing, paper, trash can, etc.) and do not remove this cover.
3. LEAVE it and EVACUATE the room.
4. KEEP others from entering the room.
5. WASH hands and face with SOAP and WATER.
6. NOTIFY local law enforcement.
7. Make a LIST of all people who were in the room or area, especially those who had contact with the suspicious item. Give this list to the law enforcement officials.

Situation 3: A person opens an envelope or package that contains powder.

1. If the powder spills, DO NOT clean powder up.
2. COVER the spilled contents immediately with anything.
3. EVACUATE the room and CLOSE the door.
4. WASH hands with soap and water.
5. DO NOT brush off clothes.
6. KEEP others away from the room.
7. NOTIFY local law enforcement. Law enforcement will assure proper custody and packing of the letter or package.
8. REMOVE contaminated clothes and place them in a plastic bag and give them to emergency responders for proper handling. Wash hands with soap and water.
9. SHOWER with SOAP and WATER as soon as possible. Do Not Use Bleach Or Other Disinfectants On Your Skin.
10. Make a LIST of all people who were in the room or area, especially those who had contact with the powder. Give this list to the public health authorities and to law enforcement officials.

Situation 4: A person sees an aerosol (for example a cloud of dust) or notices a small explosion or receives a letter stating "ANTHRAX is in the heating system":

1. LEAVE room immediately.
2. SECURE entry to the room.
3. NOTIFY local law enforcement.
4. SHUT down the air handling system if possible.
5. CALL local law enforcement and FBI.
6. REMAIN on the premises until responders arrive.

Resources: CDC Internet site about bioterrorism: www.bt.cdc.gov

Factors of suspicious letters or packages	
Excessive postage	Lopsided or uneven envelope
Handwritten or poorly typed addresses	Protruding wires or aluminum foil
Incorrect title(s)	Excessive security material (e.g., masking tape, string)
Title, but no name	Visual distractions
Misspellings of common words	Ticking sound
Oily stains, discolorations, or odor	Marked with restrictive endorsements (e.g., "Personal")
No return address	Postmark with city/state not matching return address
Excessive weight	