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THINGS You SHOULD KNOW ABOUT ANTHRAX

- Anthrax is an **acute infectious disease** caused by the **spore-forming bacterium**, *Bacillus anthracis*.
- The **anthrax bacteria occur naturally in soil and animals**. The disease has been around for tens of thousands of years. It is not unusual for farmers to contract cutaneous (skin) anthrax and recover fully after treatment.
- **Anthrax is not contagious**. It cannot be passed from one person to another.
- **Nasal swab tests will not diagnose anthrax disease**, are unreliable for assessing exposure and should not be done. There is no screening test available for diagnosing anthrax infection in a person who is not exhibiting symptoms.
- Public health experts agree that clinical testing for anthrax is not necessary unless an individual has had **direct contact with a site or facility that has tested positive for the presence of anthrax spores**, or the individual has symptoms or signs compatible with anthrax disease.
- In people with symptoms or signs (for example, an atypical skin condition) compatible with anthrax, **specific tests to diagnose anthrax disease could include blood and skin cultures and skin biopsies**.
- Treatment for confirmed anthrax includes a variety of effective antibiotics. However, individuals with no known exposure to anthrax and no symptoms should resist the temptation to ask their doctors for a “just-in-case” prescription for antibiotics. **Misuse of antibiotics can be dangerous**, leading to severe side effects and allowing other harmful germs to grow unchecked.
- As a result of **recent bioterrorist incidents** using the mail, more than 2,000 New Jersey postal workers have been evaluated. To date, less than ten people have confirmed anthrax. All these patients are now recovering.
- Remember, as frightening as anthrax can be, **the flu poses a far greater risk for most people**. Each year, more than 20,000 people die in this country from influenza while millions more become ill due to the flu.
- Finally, if you were at a site where anthrax exposure was confirmed or if you have **specific symptoms that are worsening rapidly**, call your family physician or the New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services at 609-538-6030 or 609-392-2020.

