

Anthrax in Animals

Q. CAN ANIMALS GET ANTHRAX?

A. Yes. Many species of animals are susceptible to ANTHRAX infection. The disease is most commonly seen in cattle, sheep, deer, and other grazing animals, including horses. Dogs, cats, and other pets can also become infected. Birds appear to be resistant.

Q. HOW CAN I TELL IF MY PETS OR ANIMALS MIGHT BE INFECTED?

A. Clinical signs vary between species and with the route of infection, but may include fever, loss of appetite, depression or excitation, swollen lymph nodes, bloody diarrhea, trembling, staggering, collapse, convulsions, and death. The most common clinical sign seen in livestock is the sudden death of an apparently health animal. Bloody discharges are commonly seen from the mouth, nose, anus and other body orifices after death.

More specifically:

Horses: Clinical manifestations depend upon how the infection occurred. If due to ingestion of spores, fever, colic, and bloody diarrhea may be present. Infection due to insect bite is usually characterized by localized hot, painful, edematous, subcutaneous swellings at the bite location, which often spread to the throat, lower neck, thorax, abdomen, prepuce, and mammary glands. These horses may have a high fever and respiratory distress due to swelling of the throat.

Pigs, dogs, cats and wild meat-eating animals: Swine, dogs, cats and other carnivores are usually infected following ingestion of ANTHRAX bacteria in contaminated animal remains, meat, or animal products. Typical clinical signs include depression, loss of appetite, diarrhea, and swelling of the neck secondary to regional lymph node involvement, which causes difficulty eating and breathing. Many carnivores apparently have a natural resistance to ANTHRAX, and recovery is not uncommon.

Cattle: The most common clinical sign is sudden death. Additional clinical signs include fever, loss of appetite, rumen stasis, bloody diarrhea and/or urine, abrupt decrease in milk production, and potentially blood-tinged or yellow milk.

Q. IS THERE AN ANTHRAX VACCINE FOR ANIMALS?

A. Yes. A vaccine is available for livestock.

Q. WHAT IS THE TREATMENT FOR ANTHRAX IN ANIMALS?

A. Animals can be treated by a veterinarian using appropriate antibiotics, although treatment must begin early in the course of the disease to have any chance of being effective. Regardless of treatment, the prognosis is poor and most animals will die. Animals suspected of having ANTHRAX or being treated for ANTHRAX infection should be segregated from other animals to prevent spread of the infection and widespread contamination of their environment. Do NOT give animals your medication.

Q. CAN ANIMALS WITH ANTHRAX TRANSMIT DISEASE TO OTHER ANIMALS OR PEOPLE?

A. Yes. Animals can transmit ANTHRAX to humans. Large amounts of the bacteria are present in the carcasses of dead animals and in bloody discharges from body openings. Tissues including skin and wool can contain spores, which remain “viable” (continued ability to infect) for long periods of time.

Grazing animals are usually infected with ANTHRAX directly from the soil through grazing, from feed grown on infected soil, or by drinking contaminated water. Livestock and other animals may also become infected via the contamination of existing wounds by insects carrying ANTHRAX spores or via insect bites. Carnivores are usually infected following ingestion of the bacteria in contaminated animal remains, meat, or animal products.

Q. WHAT CAN I DO TO PROTECT MY ANIMALS AND MYSELF?

A. There are a number of things you can do:

- Vaccinate your livestock if you live in an ANTHRAX endemic area.
- DO NOT handle the carcasses, tissues, fluids, hides, bones, or antlers of animals that have died of unknown causes.
- DO NOT open the carcasses of animals that have died of unknown causes.
- Carcasses of animals that have died of ANTHRAX should be thoroughly burned. Contact the Texas Animal Health Commission for disposal guidance prior to burning a carcass.
- If your pet or other animal has been exposed to, or is sick with ANTHRAX, call your veterinarian or contact the Texas Animal Health Commission.
- Isolate (separate) infected animals to prevent the spread of disease. Avoid contact with infected animals or their tissues, fluids and carcasses.
- WASH HANDS frequently with soapy water when you have had contact with animals suspected of having ANTHRAX or their tissues or fluids.
- Persons having contact with infected animals or their tissues or fluids should be evaluated promptly by a physician for the need for prophylactic antibiotic therapy.
- Disinfect areas in contact with infected animals using a mixture of one (1) part household bleach in nine (9) parts water. Apply to all surfaces and wash off with water after waiting at least 30 minutes.

Q. IF MY ANIMAL DIES FROM ANTHRAX, WHAT SHOULD I DO?

A. Contact the Texas Animal Health Commission, your veterinarian, law enforcement, or your local animal control officer to arrange for safe disposal. Do NOT touch the body or any tissues, blood or other fluids that have come from the body. DO not open the carcass. Keep other animals and people away.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT ANTHRAX CONTACT:

- Texas Department of State Health Services Zoonosis Control 512-458-7255
- DSHS Zoonosis Control Web site: www.dshs.state.tx.us/idcu/health/zoonosis
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Web site www.cdc.gov
- Texas Animal Health Commission Web site www.tahc.state.tx.us
- United States Department of Agriculture Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (USDA-APHIS) Web site, www.aphis.usda.gov