



### ***Federal Occupational Health***

## **Update: Anthrax Testing and Treatment of Mailroom Facilities and Personnel in the Metropolitan Washington DC area**

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An ongoing investigation has identified a total of 5 mailroom employees with inhalation anthrax from two mailroom facilities in the greater Washington DC Metropolitan area. Preliminary environmental sampling has also revealed contamination in mailrooms serving the Central Intelligence Agency, House of Representatives, Supreme Court, Walter Reed Army Institute of Research (WRAIR), and White House, and in the Southwest DC Postal Station. This is in addition to previous reports of contamination in the mailroom serving the Hart Senate Building, related to a *Bacillus anthracis*-contaminated letter received by a Senator.

It is important to remember that **no cases of inhalational or cutaneous anthrax have been reported among customers who entered any US Postal facility to purchase stamps or conduct other postal business.**

### **Who should receive antibiotics?**

The CDC continues to recommend that all and **only those** people who have been in the non-public, mail operations areas of the Brentwood and State Department facilities (the two facilities with inhalation anthrax cases) since October 11, 2001, receive 60-days of antibiotic preventive (prophylaxis) therapy for potential exposure to anthrax. These facilities remain closed pending the results of comprehensive environmental sampling and determination of requisite remediation. In addition, the mail facilities that supply the CIA, House office buildings, Supreme Court, WRAIR, White House, and Southwest DC postal facilities have been closed for decontamination. All workers in those mail facilities should complete a 60-day course of prophylaxis.

Health authorities in the Metropolitan Washington DC area, based on the Postal Service's mailstream flow, also recommend prophylaxis for all personnel who have worked, since October 11, 2001, in the non-public, mail operations areas at any postal facility or unique private mailroom that receives **incoming mail directly** from the Brentwood facility. While these facilities may remain open, their employees should **immediately** receive 10 days of prophylaxis. Final recommendations regarding the completion of a full 60 day course of prophylaxis will be forthcoming based on a careful risk assessment from environmental sampling from these facilities and from other clinical and epidemiologic data. Additionally, a set of protocols is being developed for facility managers in these and other facilities for the collection of environmental samples in their own facilities.

### **What antibiotic is recommended?**

Based on results of susceptibility testing conducted on all *B. anthracis* isolates to date, as well as prior guidelines, the CDC is now recommending the use of **doxycycline as the drug of**

**choice** for prophylaxis, both for newly identified individuals and for completion of the course in those previously started on ciprofloxacin. This is because it is less expensive, has less side effects and may be more effective. Ciprofloxacin is an appropriate alternative for those with sensitivity to doxycycline or other tetracyclines.

### **Where can employees receive medications?**

A number of drug distribution sites have been established in the Washington DC Metropolitan area for persons in the above groups as listed below. Persons may also contact the Maryland and Virginia Health Departments for the sites of additional prophylaxis facilities. Times and places are subject to change. Persons outside the Washington DC Metropolitan area concerned about potential exposure should seek advice from their state or local health department, or private physician.

#### Washington, DC

- DC General Hospital, 1900 Massachusetts Avenue, SE.

#### Virginia

- Fairfax County Government Center, 2<sup>nd</sup> floor, 12000 Government Center Pkwy, Fairfax.
- Loudoun County Health Department, 102 Heritage Way, NE, Leesburg.
- Prince William County Health Department, 9301 Lee Ave., Manassas.
- For more information (in Virginia), call 703/246-3796.

#### Maryland

- Prince George's County Health Department Administration Bldg., 1701 McCormick, Largo
- Suburban Maryland Processing and Distribution Center, Shady Grove Road, Gaithersburg
- Denis Avenue Health Center, 2000 Dennis Ave, Silver Spring. (**Federal employees only**)

### **What about testing of other Federal mail facilities?**

Federal Occupational Health is now working with the CDC and GSA to provide consultation and oversight to the teams performing environmental sampling of over 260 additional Federal mail facilities in the Washington DC area as part of CDC's ongoing investigation. Testing will be performed according to established CDC protocols and sent to approved labs for analysis. Samples initially testing positive will be sent to the CDC for confirmation.

### **What if additional facilities test positive for anthrax?**

Federal managers of mail facilities that test positive for anthrax will be notified by CDC investigators. Further actions will be taken as necessary based on the following protocol which is currently recommended from the CDC:

1. Only employees of and visitors to those mail facilities which initially test positive will be placed on a 10-day prophylaxis of antibiotics, if they are not already taking them. Antibiotics are not recommended or required of others who are in the same building but who do not work in or visit the mail facilities.
2. Antibiotics will be dispensed by public health authorities at locations listed above.
3. If initially positive tests are confirmed by the CDC, the period of prophylaxis will be extended to 60 days for the individuals in those facilities.
4. Mail facilities who have confirmed positive testing by the CDC will be closed for further sampling and decontamination. The remainder of the affected buildings will remain open pending the results of further investigation.

***NOTE: The above recommendations are subject to change as new information is acquired by public health authorities during the ongoing investigation. We will continue provide updates as they become available.***