

# ATTENTION

## Public Health Update

**ANDREW J SPANO**  
County Executive

**Joshua Lipsman, M.D., M.P.H.**  
Commissioner, Department of Health

---

12 October 2001 3 PM

The attached information has been provided by the New York City Department of Health.

Employees of 30 Rockefeller Plaza who spent time on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor, 7<sup>th</sup> floor, or in the mailroom on September 18<sup>th</sup> or September 25<sup>th</sup>, or physicians treating individuals who meet the above criteria, should call the New York City Department of Health phone numbers below for information regarding testing and post exposure prophylaxis:

**1-212-788-4973 (outside NYC)**

**1-866-692-3641 (within NYC)**

For Westchester County specific information:

For information for the public, call the Westchester County Department of Health Bioterrorism Information Line at:

**914-813-5609**

Or visit our website at: [www.westchestergov.com/health](http://www.westchestergov.com/health)

For physician reporting and questions, call:

**914-813-5159 Monday – Friday, 8:30 am – 4:30 pm**

**914-813-5000 24 hours a day, 7 days a week**

Or, for information for physicians, visit our website at:  
[www.westchestergov.com/health/physiciancor.htm](http://www.westchestergov.com/health/physiciancor.htm)

Laboratory directors should contact Dr. Syed Abid or Diane Anton for further information regarding testing or laboratory procedures:

**914-231-1610, Monday – Friday, 8 am – 5 pm  
and Saturday – Sunday, 9 am – 1 pm**

**All other hours, call: 914-231-1600**

# ATTENTION

## Public Health Update

**ANDREW J SPANO**  
County Executive

**Joshua Lipsman, M.D., M.P.H.**  
Commissioner, Department of Health

---

### Information for Persons at 30 Rockefeller Plaza Treated with Antibiotics to Prevent Anthrax Infection

#### **What happened at the NBC building in 30 Rockefeller Plaza?**

Preliminary tests indicate that an employee who works on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor at 30 Rockefeller Plaza has been infected by anthrax (a type of bacteria). The source of the anthrax exposure is still being investigated but it is possible that the employee may have been exposed when opening an envelope containing a powdery substance on either September 18 or 25, 2001.

#### **What is anthrax?**

- Anthrax is an infectious disease caused by the bacterium *Bacillus anthracis*, which is capable of forming spores that can travel through the air.
- Anthrax infection can occur in three forms: cutaneous (skin), inhalation (lung), and gastrointestinal (stomach and intestines).
- If people have intentionally been exposed, as in a bioterrorist release, breathing in the spores is the most likely route of exposure that might lead to a serious lung infection (inhalation anthrax). However, the infectious dose for inhalational (lung) anthrax is quite high, and requires exposure to a large number of spores (8,000 – 10,000). This high level of exposure is very unlikely to have occurred to anyone not in the immediate area when the envelopes were opened on either September 18 or 25, 2001.
- Although less likely, a cutaneous (skin) infection due to anthrax can occur if the spores are in contact with an area of skin that is not intact, such as a cut or sore. Cutaneous (skin) anthrax is marked by a boil-like lesion that eventually forms an ulcer with a black center. The cutaneous form responds well to antibiotics if treatment is started soon after symptoms appear.

#### **How likely is it that I have actually been exposed to anthrax?**

We know that the source of exposure was an envelope opened in an office on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor of 30 Rockefeller Plaza on either September 18 or 25, 2001. The risk of exposure is greatest for the few people who handled the letter *after* it was opened, or those in the *immediate* area at the time the envelope was opened. The envelopes were subsequently transported to the 7<sup>th</sup> floor of 30 Rockefeller Plaza. Other people present on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor, 7<sup>th</sup> floor and mailroom of 30 Rockefeller Plaza on either September 18 or 25, 2001 have *a very low risk* of exposure to anthrax. If you were *not* on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor, 7<sup>th</sup> floor or mailroom of 30 Rockefeller Plaza at all on September 18 or 25, 2001, you were *not* exposed.

#### **Why am I being tested with a nasal swab?**

A nasal swab is being collected from the individuals who spent time on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor, 7<sup>th</sup> floor or mailroom of 30 Rockefeller Plaza on either September 18 or 25, 2001 to look for any evidence of the anthrax spores. However, since a negative test does not completely rule out exposure to anthrax, we recommend that all persons who spent time on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor, 7<sup>th</sup> floor or mailroom of 30 Rockefeller Plaza on either September 18 or 25, 2001 complete the full

course of antibiotics to prevent infection. The testing will be done at the New York City Department of Health and results will be given to you within the week.

### **Why am I being given antibiotics?**

Because of the low risk of exposure, the New York City Department of Health is recommending to all persons who spent time on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor, 7<sup>th</sup> floor or mailroom of 30 Rockefeller Plaza on September 18 or 25, 2001 be treated with antibiotics to prevent an anthrax infection from developing. You will need to take these antibiotics for a prolonged period of time (60 days)

- **It is extremely important that you take these antibiotics exactly as you are told;** additional information may be given to you along with your antibiotics, failure to take them as often or for as long as prescribed can result in developing a serious, life-threatening anthrax infection
- **If you develop side effects from the antibiotics, call your health care provider immediately.** Depending on the type of side effects, you may be able to continue taking the medicine, or may need to be switched to an alternative antibiotic. Your physician should contact the New York City Department of Health at **1-866-692-3641 (within NYC) or 1-212-788-4973 (outside NYC)** for consultation on possible alternative antibiotics.
- **Because it is possible to develop anthrax infection even when taking antibiotics, you should watch for the following symptoms:**
  - Fever (temperature greater than 100°F)
  - Flu-like symptoms (cough, fatigue, muscle aches), nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea
  - A sore, especially on your face, arms, or hands
  - **Contact your health care provider and the New York City Department of Health immediately if you develop any of these symptoms. The New York City Department of Health telephone number for this purpose is 1-866-692-3641 (within NYC) or 1-212-788-4973 (outside NYC)**

### **The Health Department told me I was exposed, but I feel fine. Do I still need to take antibiotics?**

Yes. We cannot rule out a low-level exposure to anyone who was present on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor, 7<sup>th</sup> floor or mailroom of 30 Rockefeller Plaza on either September 18 or 25, 2001. For that reason, we are recommending that anyone present on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor, 7<sup>th</sup> floor or mailroom of 30 Rockefeller Plaza on either September 18 or 25, 2001 take antibiotics as a preventive measure.

### **Should people who were not exposed take antibiotics?**

No. Only those persons determined by the New York City Department of Health to be at risk of exposure should take antibiotics. Taking antibiotics unnecessarily can be dangerous. The course of antibiotic treatment to prevent anthrax infection is long (60 days) and many people experience side effects. Although most side effects are mild, severe side effects may occur (such as diarrhea, abdominal symptoms, rash, and allergic reactions) and the use of antibiotics may dangerously interfere with other medications. In addition, the inappropriate use of antibiotics may cause the development of antibiotic-resistant strains of common bacteria.

### **Is anthrax contagious from person to person?**

Inhalation (lung) anthrax is not spread from person to person. Even if you develop symptoms of inhalation anthrax, you are not contagious to other persons. If you develop cutaneous (skin) anthrax, the drainage from an open sore presents a **low** risk of infection to others. The only way cutaneous (skin) anthrax can be transmitted is by **direct** contact with the drainage from an open sore. Anthrax is **not** spread from person to person by casual contact, sharing office space, or by coughing and sneezing.

### **What should I do with my clothes that I wore on either September 18 or 25, 2001?**

These clothes do not pose any significant health risk to you. Washing the clothes in the regular laundry will safely remove any possible anthrax. You do not need to discard the clothes.

### **Do my family, sexual contacts or other people I have been in contact with need antibiotics?**

No. These individuals do not need antibiotics. As noted above, anthrax is not contagious. These individuals are not at risk of exposure.

**Who can I or my health care provider call if we have questions or concerns?**

Please call the New York City Department of Health at **1-866-692-3641 (within NYC) or 1-212-788-4973 (outside NYC)**. **This hotline telephone number is for employees at 30 Rockefeller Plaza and physicians only.**

# ATTENTION

## Public Health Update

**ANDREW J SPANO**  
County Executive

**Joshua Lipsman, M.D., M.P.H.**  
Commissioner, Department of Health

---

### Fact Sheet for Individuals *Not Being Treated* with Antibiotics

#### What happened at the NBC building in 30 Rockefeller Plaza?

Preliminary tests indicate that an employee who works on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor at 30 Rockefeller Plaza has been infected by anthrax (a type of bacteria). The source of the anthrax exposure is still being investigated but it is possible that the employee may have been exposed when opening an envelope containing a powdery substance on either September 18 or 25, 2001.

#### What is anthrax?

- Anthrax is an infectious disease caused by the bacterium *Bacillus anthracis*, which is capable of forming spores that can travel through the air.
- Anthrax infection can occur in three forms: cutaneous (skin), inhalation (lung), and gastrointestinal (stomach and intestines).
- If people have intentionally been exposed, as in a bioterrorist release, breathing in the spores is the most likely route of exposure that might lead to a serious lung infection (inhalation anthrax). However, the infectious dose for inhalational (lung) anthrax is quite high, and requires exposure to a large number of spores (8,000 – 10,000). This high level of exposure is very unlikely to have occurred to anyone not in the immediate area when the envelopes were opened on either September 18 or 25, 2001. Most persons who are exposed to anthrax become ill within one week, and there are no other persons on this floor or in the building with anthrax disease since the envelopes were opened on September 18 and 25, 2001.
- Although less likely, a cutaneous (skin) infection due to anthrax can occur if the spores are in contact with an area of skin that is not intact, such as a cut or sore. Cutaneous (skin) anthrax is marked by a boil-like lesion that eventually forms an ulcer with a black center. The cutaneous form responds well to antibiotics if treatment is started soon after symptoms appear.

#### Why am I not being given antibiotics to prevent anthrax infection?

You do not need antibiotics because you have not been exposed to anthrax. The decision of who to treat with antibiotics to prevent anthrax infection is based on the possibility of exposure to the bacteria. We assessed multiple factors, including the source of the anthrax bacteria and the type of air ventilation within the building, and determined that only those people who were present on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor, 7<sup>th</sup> floor or mailroom of 30 Rockefeller Plaza on September 18 or 25, 2001 have any risk of exposure. If you were *not* present on these floors during September 18 or 25, 2001, you were *not* exposed to anthrax and do not need testing or treatment.

#### How can you be sure I wasn't exposed elsewhere in the building?

In this situation, we know where and when the anthrax bacteria were present in the building— the envelopes that were opened by the employee on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor on September 18 and 25, 2001 and subsequently transported to the 7<sup>th</sup> floor. The type of air ventilation system used in this building prevented other areas from being affected. There is no

evidence that there were other sources of anthrax or that exposure occurred on different dates or on different floors. Most persons who are exposed to anthrax become ill within one week, and there are no other persons on this floor or in the building with anthrax disease since the envelopes were opened on September 18 and 25, 2001.

**I'm concerned about getting anthrax. Why shouldn't I be treated?**

If you do not need antibiotics you should not take them. Taking antibiotics unnecessarily can be dangerous. The course of antibiotic treatment to prevent anthrax infection is long (60 days) and many people experience side effects. Although most side effects are mild, severe side effects may occur (such as diarrhea, abdominal symptoms, rash, and allergic reactions) and the use of antibiotics may dangerously interfere with medications you are currently taking. In addition, the inappropriate use of antibiotics may cause the development of antibiotic-resistant strains of common bacteria.

**Should I keep a supply of antibiotics on hand, just in case?**

No, storing a supply of antibiotics "just in case" can be dangerous. Antibiotics should only be taken under the supervision of a physician who has done an evaluation to minimize the potential for side effects or interaction with other medications.

**After the anthrax infections in Florida, many people received antibiotics. Why aren't we doing the same thing here?**

Unlike the situation in Florida, the source of exposure, the date of exposure and the people in the building who may have been exposed to anthrax are known. The source of exposure and the persons that may have been exposed in Florida is still unclear, and the investigation by the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is ongoing.

**Is anthrax contagious from person to person?**

Inhalation (lung) anthrax is not spread from person to person. Even if someone develops symptoms of inhalation anthrax, they are not contagious to other persons. If someone develops cutaneous (skin) anthrax, the drainage from an open sore presents a *low* risk of infection to others. The only way cutaneous (skin) anthrax can be transmitted is by *direct* contact with the drainage from an open sore. Anthrax is *not* spread from person to person by casual contact, sharing office space, or by coughing and sneezing.

**What are the symptoms of anthrax infection?**

The symptoms of anthrax depend on where the infection is occurring, but usually develop within 7 days of exposure. Initial symptoms of inhalation (or lung) anthrax may resemble the common cold. After several days, the symptoms may progress to severe breathing difficulties. Cutaneous (or skin) anthrax is typically a boil-like lesion that eventually forms an ulcer with a black center.

**Who can I or my health care provider call if we have questions or concerns?**

Please ask him or her to call the New York City Department of Health at **877-817-7621**.