

How to Handle Anthrax and Other Biological Agent Threats

Many facilities in communities around the United States have received anthrax threat letters. Most were empty envelopes; some have contained powdery substances. The purpose of these guidelines is to recommend procedures for handling such incidents.

DO NOT PANIC

1. Anthrax organisms can cause infection in the skin, gastrointestinal system, or the lungs. To do so, the organism must be rubbed into abraded skin, swallowed, or inhaled as a fine, aerosolized mist. Disease can be prevented after exposure to the anthrax spores by early treatment with the appropriate antibiotics. Anthrax is not spread from one person to another person.
2. For anthrax to be effective as a covert agent, it must be aerosolized into very small particles. This is difficult to do and requires a great deal of technical skill and special equipment. If these small particles are inhaled, life-threatening lung infection can occur, but prompt recognition and treatment are effective.

Suspicious unopened letter or package marked with threatening message such as "Anthrax":

1. Do not shake or empty the contents of any suspicious envelope or package.
2. PLACE the envelope or package in a plastic bag or some other type of container to prevent leakage of contents.
3. If you do not have any container, then COVER the envelope or package with anything (e.g., clothing, paper, trash can, etc.) and do not remove this cover.
4. Then, LEAVE the room and CLOSE the door, or section off the area to prevent others from entering (i.e., keep others away).
5. WASH your hands with **soap and water** to prevent spreading any powder to your face.
6. What to do next...
 - If you are at **HOME**, then report the incident to local police.
 - If you are at **WORK**, then report the incident to local police, **and** notify your building security official or an available supervisor.
7. LIST all people who were in the room or area when this suspicious letter or package was recognized. Give this list to both the local public health authorities and law enforcement officials for follow-up investigation and advice.

Envelope with powder and powder spills out onto surface:

1. DO NOT try to CLEAN UP the powder. COVER the spilled contents immediately with anything (e.g., clothing, paper, trash can, etc.) and do not remove this cover.
2. Then, LEAVE the room and CLOSE the door, or section off the area to prevent others from entering (i.e., keep others away).
3. WASH your hands with **soap and water** to prevent spreading any powder to your face.
4. What to do next...
 - If you are at **HOME**, then report the incident to local police.
 - If you are at **WORK**, then report the incident to local police, **and** notify your building security official or an available supervisor.
5. REMOVE heavily contaminated clothing as soon as possible and place in a plastic bag or some other container that can be sealed. The bag of clothing should be stored in a safe place by the owner until the investigation is completed and instruction for decontamination of the clothing can be provided.
6. SHOWER with **soap and water** as soon as possible. *Do not use bleach or other disinfectant on your skin.*
7. If possible, list all people who were in the room or area, especially those who had actual contact with the powder. Give this list to both the local public health authorities so that proper instructions can be given for medical follow-up and to law enforcement officials for further investigation.

Question of room contamination by aerosolization:

For example: small device triggered, warning that air-handling system is contaminated, or warning that a biological agent has been released in a public space.

1. Turn off local fans or ventilation units in the area.
2. LEAVE the area immediately.
3. CLOSE the door or section off the area to prevent others from entering (i.e., keep others away).
4. What to do next...
 - If you are at **HOME**, then report the incident to local police.
 - If you are at **WORK**, then report the incident to local police, **and** notify your building security official or an available supervisor.
5. SHUT down the air-handling system in the building, if possible.
6. If possible, list all people who were in the room or area. Give this list to both the local public health authorities so that proper instructions can be given for medical follow-up and to law enforcement officials for further investigation.

How to identify suspicious packages and letters:

Some characteristics of suspicious packages and letters include the following:

- Excessive postage
- Handwritten or poorly typed addresses
- Incorrect titles
- Title, but no name
- Misspellings of common words
- Oily stains, discolorations, or odor
- No return address
- Excessive weight
- Lopsided or uneven envelope
- Protruding wires or aluminum foil
- Excessive security material such as masking tape, string, etc.
- Visual distractions
- Ticking sound
- Marked with restrictive endorsements such as "Personal" or "Confidential"
- Shows a city or state in the postmark that does not match the return address

In general, suspicious packages for which there is no reason to suspect chemical or biological substances should be treated according to the guidelines issued by the U.S. Postal Service. These guidelines can be found at <http://www.usps.gov/postalinspectors/is-pubs.htm>. Additional guidance can be found at http://www.usps.gov/news/2001press/pr01_1010tips.htm.