



Anthrax



What is Anthrax?

Anthrax is a rare but serious infectious disease caused by the spore forming bacteria *Bacillus anthracis*. Anthrax is potentially infectious to all mammals, but is most commonly seen in hooved animals such as cattle, sheep, goats, and deer (pronghorn, elk and moose are also susceptible). Anthrax is a very fast-acting disease with signs occurring within one to 14 days after exposure.

Where is it found?

Historically, in Wyoming, anthrax outbreaks have been documented in cattle in Laramie, Niobrara, Natrona, Carbon, Lincoln, Sublette and Teton Counties. Moose succumbed to anthrax during the 1956 outbreak in Sublette County. During August and September 2024, an outbreak in domestic cattle was detected in the Elk Mountain area of Carbon County. As of Sept. 4, 2024, anthrax has also been detected in one wild moose from the Elk Mountain area.

How is it spread?

In animals, anthrax is typically spread through ingestion or inhalation of bacterial endospores. Animals most commonly come into contact with spores while grazing on contaminated land. Anthrax spores occur naturally in the soil and become infectious under the right environmental conditions like drought followed by heavy rain with or without soil disturbance. Outbreaks usually end after cool weather arrives and spores become dormant, however spores can remain in the environment for decades.

What are some clinical signs of an anthrax infection?

Animals die quickly after being infected with anthrax. Signs of anthrax that may be present include:

- Lethargy
- Stumbling
- Trembling
- Signs of respiratory distress
- Lack of rigor mortis
- Bloat - giving the animal a sawhorse appearance
- Bloody discharge from natural orifices (mouth, nose, anus, etc.), especially unclotted blood
- Found dead with no obvious cause in an area with history of anthrax infections

How does anthrax affect me?

Anthrax is zoonotic, which means it can infect people, most commonly after coming into contact with infected animals or consuming contaminated animal products. Exposure to anthrax spores can occur through the skin, by inhalation, or by ingestion of raw or undercooked contaminated meat. Anthrax rarely causes infection in cats and dogs but can occur if they are fed contaminated animal products.

Information for outdoor recreationalists:

While human exposure is rare, you should take precautions when recreating in areas where known anthrax cases have occurred. If you see a sick or dead wild animal, with any of the previously mentioned signs, report it as soon as possible to your local Wyoming Game and Fish Department office or personnel. **DO NOT** open an animal carcass found dead on the landscape as this can lead to exposure to anthrax spores through the skin or inhalation, and do not shoot a sick animal as the gunshot wound could spread spores through the air. Do not allow dogs or other domestic animals to come in contact with sick or dead animals. If recreating on horseback, avoid areas where anthrax cases have occurred to prevent horse grazing on contaminated land. For hunters, personal protective equipment (PPE) is always recommended when field-dressing animal carcasses (i.e., disposable gloves, eye protection). Do not consume raw or undercooked game meat.

Useful websites for further information about anthrax:

<https://www.cdc.gov/anthrax/about/index>
<https://www.woah.org/en/disease/anthrax/>

For additional information on anthrax or any other wildlife disease, please contact the WGFD Wildlife Health Laboratory at 307-745-5865 or wgf-lab-notifications@wyo.gov.