

Guidance for Anthrax Threat Letters or Packages Michigan Department of Community Health

Steps in the Management of Incidents

1. Assessment of Threat

The FBI will perform an assessment to determine the credibility of the threat. Individuals who suspect an exposure should leave the room where the suspected exposure occurred, close the door, and contact their local law enforcement who in turn will contact their local FBI. The FBI can provide information on how to handle the material as evidence. The scene and any materials collected should be controlled as evidence. Local FBI agents will work with the Weapons of Mass Destruction Coordinator of the Michigan FBI to determine how to proceed.

2. Laboratory Testing

If an incident is deemed to be a credible threat by the Weapons of Mass Destruction Coordinator of the Michigan FBI, samples may be collected for further testing to rule out or rule in a biological agent. Testing of patients will be conducted only after consultation with MDCH and when there is credible reason to believe an exposure to a biological agent has occurred. Without laboratory evidence of an exposure, MDCH does not recommend performing testing on citizens who believe they have been exposed.

3. Decontamination:

Decisions about the need for decontamination depends on the suspected exposure and in most cases will not be necessary. **Unless gross contamination is evident on an individual, decontamination is unwarranted.** Decisions regarding the need for decontamination should be made by health officials responsible for the jurisdiction in which the incident occurs.

When determining the need for decontamination in a biological setting, balance the risk that decontamination poses to the patient against the benefits it could provide. Instead,

begin by removing clothes and placing them in a plastic bag pending agent identification. Taking a shower with soap and water should suffice to prevent illness. Where gross contamination is found, only those areas of the skin that have been grossly contaminated should be decontaminated. Potentially harmful practices, such as bathing patients with bleach solutions, are unnecessary and should be avoided.^{1, 2}

Specific Roles

1. **Any Emergency Department** which sees a patient or patients who report a potential exposure to anthrax or any other biological threat should immediately report this to their local health department.
2. **The local health department** should report this to their local FBI field office. If you are not aware of the phone number of the local FBI please refer to your local phone book which will have this number in the blue federal government phone listings under Federal Bureau of Investigation. All reports of a potential exposure will be evaluated by the Weapons of Mass Destruction Coordinator of the Michigan FBI before any testing by the Michigan Department of Community Health Laboratories will occur. The areas covered by the regional FBI offices can be seen at <http://detroit.fbi.gov/contact/fo/detroit/map.htm>
3. **The local health department** should alert local law enforcement of the jurisdiction in which the Emergency Department is located.
4. **The local health department** should alert the Michigan Department of Community Health there may need to be a public health intervention take place. State and local health department officials and persons with expertise in these areas also should be involved in the decision-making process. Contact should be made with the local health department, or if unable to contact the local health department right away, call the Michigan Department of Community Health at

¹ Henderson DA. The looming threat of biological terrorism. Science 1999, 283;1279-1282

² Kalm M, Kaufmann AF. Principles for Emergency Response to Bioterrorism. Ann. Emerg. Med August 1999;34:177-162

517-335-8024 during work hours or 517-335-9030 after hours or holidays. State and local health departments will coordinate the public health response.

5. Decisions about the need for decontamination and initiation of antibiotic prophylaxis should be made by health officials responsible for the jurisdiction in which the incident occurs. In most circumstances, the decision to initiate prophylaxis can be delayed until the presence or absence of *Bacillus anthracis* is determined.