



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

HOW TO HANDLE ANTHRAX THREATS DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH INTERIM GUIDELINES

Many facilities in communities around the country have received anthrax threat letters. Most were empty envelopes; some have contained powdery substances. In addition, there have been many powder sightings in public areas such as buildings and stores. The purpose of these guidelines is to recommend procedures for individuals, first responders and public health officials to handle such incidents. These guidelines are based on guidelines distributed to state health departments from the national Centers for Disease Control, and apply to possible anthrax exposures anywhere in Connecticut.

DO NOT PANIC

- 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. In most situations currently being reported, the main potential threat is of getting anthrax infection of the skin (*cutaneous* anthrax), not the form of anthrax that results from inhalation (*inhalational* anthrax).
- **Inhalational anthrax** generally requires a large dose of invisibly fine powder – particles 1-5 microns in size, a size necessary to get deep into the lungs. It is technologically very difficult to get anthrax into a form where it can be inhaled. Reaerosolization of particles on clothing and on surfaces into particles of this size is nearly impossible. Thus, **visible settled powders and letters or boxes that are opened and contain powders are usually not serious threats for inhalational anthrax.** Thus, the immediate risk to people "exposed" in these situations is small. Inhalational anthrax would be of concern if: a) a person got a face full of fine powder with heavy contamination of eyes, nose and throat; b) there was a real concern of aerosolization based on warning that an air handling system is contaminated or warning that a biological agent was released in a public space.

SUSPICIOUS UNOPENED LETTER OR PACKAGE MARKED WITH THREATENING MESSAGE SUCH AS "ANTHRAX", or OBSERVATION OF FREE POWDER WITH A THREATENING MESSAGE:

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 from being able to disturb the scene and come into physical contact with the powder or spread powder around).
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 OR IN A PUBLIC BUILDING**, then report the incident to local police, **and** notify the 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 investigations and advice.



Phone:

Telephone Device for the Deaf (860) 509-7191

410 Capitol Avenue - MS # _____

P.O. Box 340308 Hartford, CT 06134

An Equal Opportunity Employer

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. This clothing bag should be given to the emergency responders for proper handling. Note: *this instruction only applies to individuals who have powder on their clothes.*
6. SHOWER with **soap and water** as soon as possible. *Do Not Use Bleach Or Other Disinfectant On Your Skin.* Note: *this instruction only applies to individuals who have powder on their clothes.*
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 released in a public space.

1. Turn off local fans or ventilation units in the area.
2. LEAVE 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 *dial "911"* to report the incident to local police and the local FBI field office.
 - If you are at **WORK**, then *dial "911"* to report the incident to local police and the local FBI field office, **and** notify your building security official or an available supervisor.
5. SHUT down 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

DECONTAMINATION AND RE-USE OF AREA WHERE CONTAMINATION BY POWDER OCCURRED.

- Decontamination to assure there are no spores in the local area where the "incident" occurred should be done by DEP Hazardous Materials team personnel, who are experienced in decontamination AFTER powder samples have been collected by the FBI or state police. In general, wiping down surfaces can be done using a hypochlorite solution (household bleach diluted 1:10).
- The timing by which the area can be re-used should be determined based on the assessment of credibility of the threat. That assessment should be done by the FBI and/or local police **in conjunction with the local health department.**
- Where there is **not a highly credible threat**, persons can re-use the area immediately upon decontamination. A threat of low credibility would include a situation such as finding white powder on a surface such as a desk, chair, counter, floor without a warning note
- Where the **credibility of the threat is high**, the area can be re-used once decontamination has occurred and a screening test is completed that shows that no anthrax is present. A threat would be considered high credibility if a brown or sandy-colored powder came out of an envelope and was accompanied by a threatening note.