

Anthrax Vaccine:

What You Need to Know

Many Vaccine Information Statements are available in Spanish and other languages. See www.immunize.org/vis

Hojas de información sobre vacunas están disponibles en español y en muchos otros idiomas. Visite www.immunize.org/vis

1 Why get vaccinated?

Anthrax vaccine can prevent **anthrax**.

People can get anthrax disease from contact with infected animals or contaminated animal products such as wool, meat, or hides. The anthrax bacteria could also be used as a biological weapon.

Anthrax is not spread from person to person. It is spread in one of four ways, and signs and symptoms can vary depending on how anthrax enters the body:

- Through breaks in the skin. Cutaneous anthrax causes blisters or bumps on the skin, swelling around the sore, and a painless skin sore (ulcer) with a black center. The sore is usually on the face, neck, arms, or hands.
- From eating infected meat. Ingestion anthrax can cause fever and chills. It can affect the upper part of the gastrointestinal (GI) tract, the lower part of the GI tract, or both. When it affects the upper part, there is swelling of the neck or neck glands, sore throat, and painful swallowing or difficulty breathing. When it affects the lower GI tract, nausea and vomiting, stomach pain and swelling, and diarrhea may be present. The patient may also look flushed (red), have red eyes, or faint.
- From inhaling spores of the bacteria that causes anthrax. Inhalation anthrax can cause shortness of breath, cough, chest discomfort, confusion, nausea or vomiting, stomachache, sweats, and dizziness.
- From injecting heroin. Injection anthrax can result in swelling at the injection site, nausea and vomiting, and sweats.

All types of anthrax can cause fever, chills, fatigue, and headache. Anthrax can spread throughout the body and cause severe illness, including brain infections and even death, if left untreated.

2 Anthrax vaccine

Anthrax vaccine is approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and recommended for adults 18 through 65 years of age **who are at risk of exposure to anthrax bacteria**, including:

- Certain laboratory workers who work with *Bacillus anthracis*
- People who handle potentially infected animals or their carcasses
- Some military personnel (determined by the Department of Defense)
- Some emergency and other responders whose response activities might lead to exposure

These people should get 3 doses of anthrax vaccine, followed by booster doses for ongoing protection.

Anthrax vaccine is also recommended for **unvaccinated people of all ages who have been exposed to anthrax**. These people should get 3 doses of anthrax vaccine together with recommended antibiotic drugs.

Anthrax vaccine has not been studied or used in children less than 18 years of age. Because its use in exposed children is not approved by FDA, it must be used under an expanded access Investigational New Drug (IND) program and requires informed consent from a parent or legal guardian.



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Talk with your health care provider

Tell your vaccine provider if the person getting the vaccine:

- Has had an **allergic reaction after a previous dose of anthrax vaccine**, or has any **severe, life-threatening allergies**.
- Is **pregnant** or thinks she might be pregnant.
- Has a **weakened immune system**.
- Has a **history of anthrax disease**.

In some cases, your health care provider may decide to postpone anthrax vaccination to a future visit.

People with minor illnesses, such as a cold, may be vaccinated. People who are moderately or severely ill should usually wait until they recover before getting anthrax vaccine.

If you are receiving the vaccine because you have been exposed to anthrax, tell your health care provider if you are not feeling well. You might need immediate medical care.

Your health care provider can give you more information.

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Risks of a vaccine reaction

After getting a shot of anthrax vaccine, you may have:

- Tenderness, redness, itching, or a lump or bruise where the shot is given
- Muscle aches or short-term trouble moving your arm
- Headaches or fatigue

People sometimes faint after medical procedures, including vaccination. Tell your provider if you feel dizzy or have vision changes or ringing in the ears.

As with any medicine, there is a very remote chance of a vaccine causing a severe allergic reaction, other serious injury, or death.

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What if there is a serious problem?

An allergic reaction could occur after the vaccinated person leaves the clinic. If you see signs of a severe allergic reaction (hives, swelling of the face and throat, difficulty breathing, a fast heartbeat, dizziness, or weakness), call **9-1-1** and get the person to the nearest hospital.

For other signs that concern you, call your health care provider.

Adverse reactions should be reported to the Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System (VAERS). Your health care provider will usually file this report, or you can do it yourself. Visit the VAERS website at www.vaers.hhs.gov or call **1-800-822-7967**. *VAERS is only for reporting reactions, and VAERS staff do not give medical advice.*

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Countermeasures Injury Compensation Program

The Countermeasures Injury Compensation Program is a federal program that may help pay for costs of medical care and other specific expenses of certain people who have been seriously injured by certain medicines or vaccines. If you have been injured by the anthrax vaccine, you can learn more about this Program by visiting the program's website at www.hrsa.gov/cicp, or calling **1-855-266-2427**.

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How can I learn more?

- Ask your health care provider.
- Call your local or state health department.
- Contact the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC):
 - Call **1-800-232-4636 (1-800-CDC-INFO)** or
 - Visit CDC's anthrax website at www.cdc.gov/anthrax

