



US Naval Hospital Okinawa  
Department of Internal Medicine

**ANTHRAX**  
*Patient Information*

Dear Patient—

You have just been evaluated for exposure to Anthrax. Anthrax is caused by spores being introduced into the body and causing an infection that can be life-threatening. The type of anthrax infection depends on how the spores entered the body. Most commonly, patients exposed to anthrax will get either the skin form (cutaneous) or the inhaled form (respiratory).

You have been started on antibiotics for:

**Prophylaxis**—You may have been exposed to anthrax. We will initiate antibiotics until the results of testing have confirmed whether you were exposed to anthrax. If real, you will be on antibiotics for 60 days to prevent the occurrence of infection. Be wary of any new bug bites or sores or any new flu-like symptoms that develop during this time period or immediately following the antibiotics. Also inform your primary care provider that you have been exposed to anthrax when seeking care.

**Cutaneous Anthrax**—You appear to have contracted the skin form of anthrax. The disease starts as a small itchy bump, progresses through a blister or boil stage, then evolves into an open sore (ulcer) with a depressed black center or scab. Sometimes there is surrounding redness, swelling and lymph node enlargement. Within 1-2 weeks the sore will heal, usually leaving no scar. You will need to take your antibiotics for a total of 60 days. Be wary of any new bug bites or sores or any new flu-like symptoms that develop during this time period or immediately following the antibiotics. Also inform your primary care provider when seeking care, that you have been infected with anthrax and currently are under treatment.

**Respiratory Anthrax**—This is the most serious form of anthrax and early treatment is essential. Respiratory anthrax starts out as general flu-like symptoms of fever, muscle aches, fatigue, nonproductive cough, and mild chest discomfort. If untreated, symptoms will progress to severe shortness of breath, heart failure, septic shock and death. If respiratory anthrax is suspected, you will be admitted to the hospital and treated aggressively with IV antibiotics. Ultimately upon discharge you will be given a total of 60 days of antibiotics. Be wary of any new bug bites or sores or any new flu-like symptoms that develop during this time period or immediately following the antibiotics. Also inform your primary care provider when seeking care, that you have been infected with anthrax and currently are under treatment.

There are several different antibiotics that are used to treat anthrax. The primary ones are Cipro and Doxycycline. Although both of these medications are usually well tolerated, there is always the possibility of side effects. Cipro has been associated with nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, headaches, dizziness, sun sensitivity and rash. Doxycycline has been associated with nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, vaginal yeast infections, sun sensitivity and changes to the tongue. Rarely doxycycline has been associated with liver and blood problems. Like any medication, there's always a risk of having an allergic reaction. Be wary of swelling of your lips, face, tongue, difficulty breathing or pervasive rashes or hives. These medications usually wouldn't be prescribed for children or pregnant women, but as per CDC recommendations the life-threatening nature of anthrax outweighs the possibility of side effects. Cipro has been known to cause joint problems in children; whereas, doxycycline has been shown to cause stunting of skeletal growth and discolored teeth in children with an increase in liver problems in pregnant women.

Make sure that you take your medications as directed. If your symptoms worsen, change or don't resolve with the current medications or if you have any concerns regarding the medications that you are taking, please contact the internal medicine doctor that initially evaluated you. If for some reason that person is not available, arrangements will be made for another internal medicine doctor to see you. Internal Medicine is located at 2East at the US Naval Hospital and can be reached at #643-7714/15.