

FACT SHEET

ANTHRAX



livestock
health &
biosecurity
VICTORIA



Victorian
Farmers
Federation

WHAT IS ANTHRAX?

Anthrax is a serious infectious disease that can affect a range of animals, as well as humans.

It is important producers are aware of the signs of anthrax to ensure a rapid response to an outbreak.

Any suspected cases must be reported to the 24-hour Emergency Animal Disease Hotline on 1800 675 888, to the local vet or to Agriculture Victoria animal health staff.

ANTHRAX IN AUSTRALIA

Anthrax has occurred sporadically in Australia for over 150 years. It's known to have spread along old stock routes through central NSW into northern Victoria.

Anthrax has been seen in many parts of Victoria, with recent cases confined to northern regions.

HOW IS IT SPREAD?

The bacteria *Bacillus anthracis* forms spores that persist in the soil for decades. Soil, hair, hides and wool are all also possible places for spores to exist, as well as processed skins and hides of infected animals.

Anthrax spores are usually disrupted by earthworks, heavy rain or deep grazing, particularly over summer months when stock graze closer to the ground.

Disturbed spores are ingested by livestock and affected carcasses are a source of infection for other stock.

WHAT ARE THE SIGNS?

The first sign of anthrax in livestock is usually an unexplained sudden death in one or more otherwise healthy animals.

In these animals, the blood usually fails to clot and a dark discharge may be present around the eyes, nose, anus, vulva or udder.

Affected animals may show signs of illness in the very early stages. These animals have a high temperature, muscle tremors, difficulty breathing and/or convulsions. These signs are not often observed and animals are usually found dead.



Images: A cow that has died from anthrax on the left, and sheep on the right, note the blood discharge from eyes, nostrils and mouth. Source: NSW DPI.

WHAT IF ANTHRAX IS SUSPECTED?

Do not handle, move or open suspect carcasses. The anthrax bacteria may infect you or form spores which can contaminate the environment and increase the risk of spread.

Prevent other animals, including dogs, cats and scavengers from accessing the carcasses to prevent spread.

If you suspect anthrax in livestock, call your preferred vet, local Agriculture Victoria animal health staff or the 24-hour Emergency Animal Disease Hotline on 1800 675 888 immediately.

Appropriate samples are collected and tested on farm using the ICT kit with results available in 15 minutes. Further testing may be carried out in a laboratory.

TREATING INFECTED ANIMALS

If caught early, treatment can be attempted with antibiotics but in most situations animals are found dead.

A highly effective vaccine is available to prevent anthrax. It is usually restricted to affected properties and their neighbours.

WHEN ANTHRAX IS CONFIRMED

Agriculture Victoria staff will respond, working closely with you to restrict spread and decontaminate the site.

- ▶ Affected properties are quarantined, with total restriction on livestock movements. Quarantine is released when at least 20 days have passed since any anthrax case and vaccination round.
- ▶ Dead animals are safely disposed of, usually by burning so there is no remaining hide, hair or bone to ensure there are no remaining anthrax spores.
- ▶ Animals on infected properties will be initially vaccinated free of charge by Agriculture Victoria, possibly with animals on neighbouring properties as well.
- ▶ Non-infected properties where animals have been vaccinated will be quarantined for the same period as affected properties.

IMPACT OF ANTHRAX

If an outbreak is reported promptly, there is usually only a short-term economic impact on producers due to stock losses and inability to trade during quarantine restrictions.

There is also considerable impact due to resources and effort required for disposal of affected carcasses and decontamination.

THINGS TO REMEMBER:

- ▶ If you suspect anthrax, report it to the 24-hour Emergency Animal Disease Hotline on 1800 675 888, to your local vet or to Agriculture Victoria animal health staff.
- ▶ The first sign of anthrax is usually a dead animal. **Do not handle or move suspect carcasses.**
- ▶ Anthrax is a disease that affects humans and a range of animals, although most cases in Victoria involve sheep or cattle.

CAN IT AFFECT HUMANS?

Yes, anthrax is a relatively rare disease with serious consequences including death. The last confirmed human case in Victoria occurred in February 2007 in a knacker worker.

Human cases of anthrax usually occur when people come into contact with affected animal products. People can become infected through cuts and abrasions when handling infectious material such as an animal that has died from anthrax, or breathing in anthrax spores from infected animal products. It can affect people's skin, respiratory and gastric systems.

Illness usually develops in two to seven days of exposure, and treatment options include antibiotics and hospitalisation in intensive care.

Anthrax infection is very serious and anyone who thinks they may have been exposed to infected livestock or materials should seek medical advice immediately.

For further information, please contact Livestock Health & Biosecurity on 1300 882 833 or lhbv@vff.org.au

FURTHER LINKS

[DEDJTR – Anthrax in animals](http://agriculture.vic.gov.au/agriculture/pests-diseases-and-weeds/animal-diseases/general-livestock-diseases/anthrax-in-animals)

<http://agriculture.vic.gov.au/agriculture/pests-diseases-and-weeds/animal-diseases/general-livestock-diseases/anthrax-in-animals>

[NSW DPI – Anthrax Prime Facts](http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0013/52312/Anthrax.pdf)

http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0013/52312/Anthrax.pdf

[Better Health Channel – Anthrax in humans](https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/conditionsandtreatments/anthrax)

<https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/conditionsandtreatments/anthrax>

[AUSVETPLAN Anthrax Disease Strategy](https://www.animalhealthaustralia.com.au/download/9794/)

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