



Public Health Bulletin

surveillance - reporting - communications - response

NJ-LINCS

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Guidelines For Suspect Anthrax Incidents Sample Collection, Building Evacuation, Decontamination and Re-Entry Revised October, 2002

Attention all first responders, including local police and law enforcement officers, HAZMAT team members, fire fighters, emergency medical services personnel, and local health officials.

The purpose of this bulletin is to provide supplemental guidance to law enforcement and public health emergency responders and decision makers regarding the handling of public complaints of suspicious packages or materials that may be thought to be associated with an act of biological terrorism related to Anthrax. This bulletin does not supersede any other federal, state, or local directives on this matter. Rather, its purpose is to provide supplemental guidance to facilitate a protective and appropriate level of response, balancing the need to consider the most effective way to deploy assets and resources, including laboratory services, and minimizing unnecessary disruption of daily activities.

First responders and incident commanders are requested to use the following guidelines to discern a credible Anthrax threat from incidents of lesser concern for the collection, handling and submission of samples; and for building or facility evacuation, clean-up and re-entry. It must be recognized that this is general guidance and each event may present conditions or circumstances that warrant a different approach. It must also be recognized that the State Public Health and Environmental Laboratories (PHEL) has tested more than 4,700 samples since September, 2001 and there have been **NO** positive results other than those caused by anthrax-filled letters sent through the postal system last fall which have been reported in the media and on the NJDHSS web site.

Responding to a Reported Suspect Anthrax Incident:

- **First responders and incident commanders must use basic law enforcement and other appropriate established protocols, procedures, and investigatory techniques for responding to and assessing suspect incidents and in distinguishing credible threats to public health and safety from other suspicious occurrences.** Basic investigatory techniques should include a thorough on-site assessment of the incident. The following criteria and procedures are to be employed for suspect Anthrax threats.

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Criteria for CREDIBLE Anthrax Threats:

Only items meeting the following criteria are to be treated as credible Anthrax threats.

- The item was recently introduced from an unknown source or was/is discovered in a public area of a business or other public place, **and/or**
- If a package or letter, the item is addressed to a government agency, public figure, public utility, large high profile business, etc., **and**
- The item or its contents ARE visibly contaminated with a powdery substance.

Approved credible threat items* should be collected, properly packaged and delivered by the local police department to the NJDHSS Laboratories in Trenton for testing. **ALL SAMPLES MUST BE APPROVED FOR TESTING BY THE STATE HEALTH DEPARTMENT BEFORE DELIVERING THEM TO THE STATE LABORATORIES. SAMPLES WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED WITHOUT PRE-APPROVAL.** To obtain approval, contact the NJDHSS Communicable Disease Service at 609-588-7500 during regular business hours and 609-392-2020 at all other times.

*Samples larger than 1'x 1'x 2' are too large to be tested. In cases where a suspect item exceeds these dimensions, only a small representative section of the item containing the suspicious substance is to be submitted for testing. If this is impractical due to the nature of the suspicious item, collect a swab sample for transport to the State laboratory using established procedures and universal precautions. The remaining part of the suspect item should be decontaminated with a solution of one part household bleach to 10 parts water.

When final results are determined, Communicable Disease Service staff will contact the Health Officer in the jurisdiction where the sample was collected. The Health Officer will then notify law enforcement and other involved agencies or individuals as appropriate of the results and initiate follow up if necessary.

Suspicious Non-Credible Anthrax Threat Items:

Suspicious, non-credible Anthrax threat items are NOT to be sent to the State laboratories for testing. While suspect items may be considered suspicious for other reasons and should be handled by standard established protocols, they do not necessarily constitute a credible threat for Anthrax contamination.

Any item meeting the following criteria are considered suspicious, but are NOT a credible threat:

- Any packages and letters featuring excessive postage, unusual wrapping, packaging materials; missing or unfamiliar return addresses, unusual bulging, improper spelling of names, addresses; suspicious or threatening messages, unusual handwriting or lettering, etc.
- Letters, packages or other suspect items that DO NOT show visible evidence of contamination by a powdery substance.

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Individuals reporting such incidents need to understand that the above-described item is not a credible threat. If the individual insists that the item be removed,

- The suspicious item should be collected, triple plastic bagged, all bags sealed, and the outer bag labeled with the word “Hazard.”
- The properly packaged item is then to be taken by the local police officials to an identified, secure, and centralized collection point under their control where standard police protocols are used to maintain the continuity of evidence.

Incident Site Assessment, Building Evacuation, Decontamination and Re-Entry

Due to the uncertainty of the incident, first responders should practice standard precautions and procedures in assessing reported suspect Anthrax incidents.

- In most cases it is UNNECESSARY to evacuate or close an entire building or facility. The scene (area, floor, etc) where the material was discovered should, however, be calmly secured.
- First responders should act calmly and emphasize that there is no reason to panic.
- Any individuals who have had contact with the suspect material or have been in the immediate area of the material should be moved to a separate area and be kept available for interviewing purposes.
- Any suspect item or suspicious package should be secured and handled by following standard protocols and procedures. More information can be found on the NJDHSS web site at <http://www.state.nj.us/health>. Additional information for law enforcement officers on procedures to be followed with suspicious packages involved in a suspect bio-chemical incident will be forwarded from New Jersey State Police.
- The decision on clean-up or decontamination of the affected area(s) and the procedures to be employed are to be made, in consultation with local or State public health officials (609-588-7500 during business hours; 609-392-2020 after hours, holidays and weekends) and HAZMAT experts, by the incident commander (i.e., police, fire fighter, etc) in charge of the scene. In most cases, simple clean-up and decontamination procedures will be adequate using a 1:10 household bleach-to-water solution with a 5 minute contact time (and rinse). In most cases, laboratory confirmation will not be needed for re-entry.
- Before re-entry is permitted, assure that all affected employees, the public or other individuals involved in the incident understand that everything has been done to protect their health.

Information Regarding Evidence Return

- After a sample has been tested and found to be negative for the suspected agent, the PHEL staff will contact the submitter by phone to determine the need to return the sample as possible evidence.

NOTE: Positive samples will not be released without consultation with appropriate State/Federal agencies

- If there is no need to return a sample, an Authorization of Destruction form will be faxed to the submitter to be signed and returned

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- If a sample is to be returned, the submitter will make arrangements with NJDHSS PHEL staff to pick up sample at NJDHSS, Health & Agriculture Building (Greenhouse entrance)
- The original Chain of Custody (COC) form will be signed by the individual picking up the evidence sample. The time and date of sample release will also be documented on the COC form.
- All evidence is secured in a designated area of the Bioterrorism laboratory containment facility until release is faxed back to NJDHSS. Forms will be filed and stored at NJDHSS and the samples will be destroyed.

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