

# Health Advisory: Animal Anthrax Cases in Kittson County

Minnesota Department of Health, Tues, July 18 12:00 CDT 2023

## Action Steps

**Local and tribal health department:** Please forward to hospitals, clinics, urgent care centers, emergency departments, and convenience clinics in **Kittson, Roseau and Marshall** counties.

**Hospitals, clinics, and other facilities** in **Kittson, Roseau and Marshall:** Please forward to infection preventionists, internists, infectious disease doctors, emergency department staff, dermatology clinics, and all other health care providers who might see patients presenting with a new skin lesion or respiratory illness.

**Health care providers** in **Kittson, Roseau and Marshall:**

- Consider anthrax in patients with exposure to livestock who also have:
  - New or worsening skin infections, lesions or sores or
  - Fever, malaise, mild cough, chest pain, progress to severe pulmonary symptoms or
  - Abdominal distress, pain, nausea, vomiting, followed by fever, and signs of septicemia.
- Contact MDH (24/7) at 651-201-5414 (1-877-676-5414) for consultation.
- Test patients who meet both relevant exposure and clinical criteria by sending clinical specimens to the Minnesota Department of Health Public Health Laboratory. Contact MDH at 651-201-5414 (1-877-676-5414) for approval prior to sending

## Background

Since June 20, 2023, there have been confirmed reports of livestock deaths due to anthrax on farms in Kittson County. The bacteria that cause anthrax, *Bacillus anthracis*, is naturally found in the soil and can cause illness in animals such as horses and cattle under a variety of environmental conditions ranging from floods to disturbances of contaminated soil to extended periods of very dry weather. Recognized animal anthrax outbreaks in Minnesota are rare and often occur when wet weather is followed by drought. In rare circumstances, exposure to sick animals or their carcasses can cause illness in humans. Naturally occurring anthrax can be spread through direct, unprotected contact with an ill animal or carcass. Anthrax is not contagious and is not a risk to the general public. (In rare cases, person-to-person transmission has been reported with cutaneous anthrax, where discharges from skin lesions might be infectious.) Please be alert for possible cases of anthrax in people exposed to infected livestock.

Most human infections with *B. anthracis* present with skin lesions, but can also manifest as pulmonary or gastrointestinal symptoms. Clinical symptoms can vary but can include fever, cough, chest pain, new or worsening skin infections, nausea, and vomiting. If a patient presents with clinically compatible symptoms, healthcare providers should directly inquire about recent history of contact with ill animals or animal carcasses.

## Testing

Clinical laboratories should not attempt to culture specimens from suspected anthrax patients. Clinical specimens can be sent to the MDH Public Health Laboratory (PHL) for testing. If any positive cultures display large, Gram-positive rods consistent with *B. anthracis*, please report it to MDH immediately. The MDH-PHL BioThreat on call staff can be reached at (612) 282-3723 (also available 24/7).

## For More Information

- [BAH: Anthrax confirmed in Kittson County cow \(https://www.bah.state.mn.us/news\\_release/anthrax-confirmed-in-kittson-county-cow/\)](https://www.bah.state.mn.us/news_release/anthrax-confirmed-in-kittson-county-cow/)
- [CDC Anthrax \(https://www.cdc.gov/anthrax/index.html\)](https://www.cdc.gov/anthrax/index.html)

A copy of this HAN is available at: [MDH Health Alert Network \(www.health.state.mn.us/han\)](http://www.health.state.mn.us/han)

The content of this message is intended for public health and health care personnel and response partners who have a need to know the information to perform their duties.