



MLS: Laboratory Advisory

MDH Investigates a Natural Case of Inhalational Anthrax

August 9, 2011

Purpose of this Message

To inform you of the ongoing investigation of a natural case of inhalational anthrax identified in Minnesota and to remind laboratories of the importance of continued vigilance and attention to following the LRN Sentinel Laboratory Protocols for recognizing, ruling out, and referring potential agents of bioterrorism.

Case Information

The Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) is working with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to investigate an apparent case of inhalational anthrax in an individual who officials believe acquired the infection from the natural environment. The individual was hospitalized in Minnesota after traveling through western states, including North Dakota, Montana, Wyoming, and South Dakota. The individual had exposure to soil and animal remains, and all evidence indicates that this case was the result of environmental exposure and not a criminal or terrorist act.

The isolate was first recognized by astute clinical laboratorians in Minnesota who used the testing algorithm in the Guidelines for LRN Advanced Sentinel Laboratories to quickly refer the isolate to the MDH Public Health Laboratory (MDH-PHL). Subsequent analysis at MDH-PHL confirmed the identification of *Bacillus anthracis*. In light of the patient's exposure history and lack of evidence indicating a criminal or terrorist threat, no additional cases are expected in Minnesota. The individual is being treated at a Minnesota hospital.

Sentinel Protocols for Ruling Out Potential *B. anthracis* Isolates

Even though this case is considered an extremely rare event, it highlights the critical role of LRN Advanced Sentinel Laboratories in the early detection of public health threats, especially those involving potential agents of bioterrorism. This case also serves as a reminder to all LRN Advanced Sentinel Laboratories of the importance of maintaining vigilance and the ability to rapidly and accurately rule-out or refer potential bioterrorism. Clinical laboratorians quickly recognized the key features of this isolate: a large Gram-positive rod that is non-hemolytic, non-motile and catalase positive. They also were careful to follow proper biosafety practices while working with this isolate to prevent exposure. As always, if your laboratory is unable to rule-out an isolate using the Guidelines for LRN Advanced Sentinel Laboratories, please contact MDH-PHL immediately by phone at 651-201-5073, or 877-676-5414 after hours. The Guidelines for LRN Advanced Sentinel Laboratories can be accessed through the MLS website at <http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/phl/labep/binder3.html>.

Additional Information

Cases of anthrax in hooved animals occur yearly in parts of the country including the Midwest and West as far south as Texas, and up to the Canadian border. Health officials stress that this case does not represent an increased risk of anthrax to the public. Anthrax is not spread from person to person, and it is extremely rare for humans to become sickened with anthrax, especially through inhalation. In rare cases,

individuals can become sickened by anthrax if they handle infected animal carcasses or ingest contaminated soil or meat from infected animals. People can also become infected by handling contaminated wool, hides, or other products from infected animals. Because these cases are so rare, health officials are not discouraging people from traveling to areas where anthrax can be found naturally in the environment.

To read the entire new release, please see:

www.health.state.mn.us/news/pressrel/2011/anthrax080911.html

Thank you all for your ongoing efforts to help us accomplish our mission of protecting, maintaining, and improving the health of all Minnesotans.

Maureen Sullivan
Emergency Preparedness and Response Unit Supervisor
Minnesota Department of Health
Public Health Laboratory – EPR Unit
(651)201-5582
Maureen.sullivan@state.mn.us

Nathan Kendrick, MS, M(ASCP)
State Laboratory Training Coordinator
Minnesota Department of Health
Public Health Laboratory – EPR Unit
(651) 201-5573
nathan.kendrick@state.mn.us

This is an advisory from the Minnesota Department of Health – Public Health Laboratory (MDH-PHL) and the Minnesota Laboratory System (MLS). This message is being sent to MLS laboratory contacts serving Minnesota residents. You are not required to reply to this message.

****Please forward this to all appropriate personnel within your institution and Health System****

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