



Anthrax: How to Recognize and Handle a Suspicious Package or Envelope

Between September and October 2001, letters containing *Bacillus anthracis* were received by mail in several areas of the United States. As a result, CDC developed the following guidelines for recognizing and handling suspicious packages as a result. Although there have been no recent mail-related anthrax exposures, all persons should take appropriate steps to protect themselves and others from exposure to *Bacillus anthracis* by following these guidelines for recognizing and handling suspicious packages.

Identifying Suspicious Packages and Envelopes

Some characteristics of suspicious packages and envelopes include the following:

- Inappropriate or unusual labeling
 - Excessive postage
 - Handwritten or poorly typed addresses
 - Misspellings of common words
 - Strange return address or no return address
 - Incorrect titles or title without a name
 - Not addressed to a specific person
 - Marked with restrictions, such as "Personal," "Confidential," or "Do not x-ray"
 - Marked with any threatening language
 - Postmarked from a city or state that does not match the return address
- Appearance
 - Powdery substance felt through or appearing on the package or envelope
 - Oily stains, discolorations, or odor
 - Lopsided or uneven envelope
 - Excessive packaging material such as masking tape, string, etc.
- Other suspicious signs
 - Excessive weight
 - Ticking sound
 - Protruding wires or aluminum foil

If a package or envelope appears suspicious, DO NOT OPEN IT.

Handling of Suspicious Packages or Envelopes

- Do not shake or empty the contents of any suspicious package or envelope.
- Do not carry the package or envelope, show it to others or allow others to examine it.
- Put the package or envelope down on a stable surface; do not sniff, touch, taste, or look closely at it or at any contents which may have spilled.
- Alert others in the area about the suspicious package or envelope. Leave the area, close any doors, and take actions to prevent others from entering the area. If possible, shut off the ventilation system.

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- WASH hands with soap and water to prevent spreading potentially infectious material to face or skin. Seek additional instructions for exposed or potentially exposed persons.
- If at work, notify a supervisor, a security officer, or a law enforcement official. If at home, contact the local law enforcement agency.
- If possible, create a list of persons who were in the room or area when this suspicious letter or package was recognized and a list of persons who also may have handled this package or letter. Give this list to both the local public health authorities and law enforcement officials.

For more information, visit www.bt.cdc.gov/agent/anthrax, or call the CDC public response hotline at (888) 246-2675 (English), (888) 246-2857 (español), or (866) 874-2646 (TTY).

November 2003

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