Anthrax and Other Biological Threats
at The University of Cincinnati

Immediately after the 9/11/2001 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centers in New York City, many facilities received letters containing anthrax, or letters threatening to contain anthrax. The vast majority did not contain anthrax, but in a few cases some persons were intentionally infected by the anthrax bacteria. The following provides guidance and outlines University procedures for handling suspicious letters and packages that may contain anthrax.

Anthrax-General Information

Anthrax organisms can cause infection in the skin, gastrointestinal system, or the lungs. The organism can enter the body through broken or abraded skin, swallowed, or inhaled as a fine, aerosolized mist. The disease can be prevented after exposure by early treatment with antibiotics. Anthrax is not contagious and cannot be spread similarly as a cold or flu for example.

Suspicious Unopened Letter or Package

1. Do not open, shake, or otherwise tamper with the package;
2. If a plastic bag is readily available, place the package inside the bag and seal it; (clear plastic if possible);
3. Leave the room where the package is located, and close the door. Prevent anyone else from entering the room;
4. Dial 911 to report the incident;
5. Rinse/flush your hands first with water, and then wash your hands with soap and warm water to avoid spreading any potential contamination;
6. Keep all people who were in the room together until the police arrive. Avoid direct contact with any other persons to avoid spreading any potential contamination.

Letter or Package Where Powder Spills Out

1. Do not try to clean up the powder;
2. If possible, place a garbage can or other container over the spilled powder to prevent further spread;
3. Leave the room where the package is, and close the door. Prevent anyone else from entering the room;
4. Dial 911 to report the incident;
5. Remove any clothing items contaminated with powder and place inside a plastic bag;
6. Wash your hands with soap and warm water to avoid spreading any potential contamination;
7. Keep all people who were in the room together until the police arrive. Avoid direct contact with any other persons to avoid spreading any potential contamination.
Next steps

Police and fire will respond to investigate any suspicious items reported. If people have been contaminated with powder, and no immediate determination can be made as to the nature of the powder, further decontamination may be undertaken (showering and changing clothes). The suspicious materials may be sent to the Ohio Department of Health for lab tests. Should the tests show the presence of anthrax, all persons who were potentially exposed will be contacted for further medical follow-up. It is important to remember that while anthrax is dangerous, prompt recognition and treatment are effective.