

GUIDELINES

FOR DEALING WITH SUSPECTED CHEMICAL OR BIOLOGICAL SUBSTANCES IN PACKAGES FROM THE U.S. POSTAL SERVICE OR OTHER COURIERS

(updated October 29, 2001)

In these guidelines, the word "package" describes any parcel, package, envelope, or other item received through the mail or by other services such as Federal Express, UPS, etc.

In general, suspicious packages for which there is no reason to suspect chemical or biological substances should be treated according to the guidelines issued by the US Postal Service, which can be found at <http://www.usps.gov/postalinspectors/is-pubs.htm>. Further guidance can be found at http://www.usps.gov/news/2001/press/pr01_1010tips.htm.

STAY CALM

1. Anthrax organisms can cause infection in the skin, gastrointestinal system, or the lungs. To do so, the organism must be rubbed into abraded skin, swallowed, or inhaled as a fine, aerosolized mist. Disease can be prevented after exposure to the anthrax spores by early treatment with the appropriate antibiotics. Anthrax is not spread from one person to another person.
2. For anthrax to be effective as a covert agent, it must be aerosolized into very small particles. This is difficult to do and requires a great deal of technical skill and special equipment. If these small particles are inhaled, life-threatening lung infection can occur, but prompt recognition and treatment are effective.

If you receive a package suspected of containing chemical or biological substances, please follow the steps below:

1. Handling of Suspicious Packages or Envelopes

- Do not shake or empty the contents of a 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 on a stable surface. Do not sniff, touch, taste, or look closely at the package/envelope or any contents that 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.
- 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 the list to both the local public health authorities and law enforcement officials.
- Go to Step 2.

2. **Local emergency response authorities** (fire department or hazardous materials team) should determine whether there is any immediate chemical or physical threat (e.g., a letter bomb) posed by the package or substance. If local emergency response authorities determine that there is an immediate chemical or physical threat, they should respond to this threat as they would any other similar hazardous material or bomb incident, and decontamination of those exposed and cleanup of the scene should be coordinated by emergency response authorities.
- **If a physical or chemical threat was found**, after that threat has been contained, go to Step 5.
 - **If no immediate chemical or physical threat was found**, the possibility of biological agents may still exist.
 - **If the contents of the package are still completely contained in the package**, go to Step 5.
 - **If any of the package contents have leaked or spilled outside the package**, go to Step 3.

3. **Has anyone been contaminated by the contents from the package?**

- **No contamination:** After they have been identified by either law enforcement or local health officials, all exposed persons with no contamination can be released from the area to go to their homes, remove and place their clothing into a plastic bag, and then shower with soap and water.
- **Contamination:** Any persons who have been contaminated should be brought a change of outer clothing from their home, and they should change into that clothing at the site. Then those persons can go home and shower as described above.

All bagged clothing should be kept bagged and sealed until the nature of the contamination has been determined. Go to Step 4.

4. **Cleanup of Area**

If health department, law enforcement, and emergency response authorities authorize cleanup of the area, it can be done by:

- Gently wetting the scene with a disinfectant (to minimize dust)
- Removing any spilled material using rags or paper towels
- Thoroughly wiping down the area with disinfectant

The appropriate disinfectant is a 0.5% hypochlorite solution (i.e., one (1) part household bleach to ten (10) parts water). Those involved in the cleanup should wear a dust mask, surgical mask, or some similar mask. They should also wear latex or rubber gloves that will not be damaged by the bleach solution. All materials used in the cleanup, including masks and gloves, should be placed into plastic bags and sealed, secured, and kept until health officials determine how to dispose of the material. Go to Step 5.

5. **Laboratory Testing**

When authorized by law enforcement authorities, and after a determination that **no physical threat exists** in further handling of the package, the container (plastic bag or large envelope) that the original package was placed in should itself be placed in yet another plastic bag and sealed. Then the now double-wrapped and sealed package should be sent to the Indiana State Department of Health Laboratories (ISDH Labs) for testing to determine if a biological agent is present. Law enforcement authorities, assisted by local health and emergency response officials, should coordinate transporting the package to the ISDH Labs in such a way that the chain of evidence custody is maintained. **Because these incidents are potential crimes, ISDH Laboratories will accept materials for testing from law enforcement authorities only. If in Step 4 a chemical threat was found to exist with the substance involved, the ISDH Labs MUST be notified of this threat so that any necessary precautions can be taken in handling the substance.** As soon as results are available, usually within 24-48 hours, the ISDH will contact the submitter of the envelope with the results of any testing done on the contents of the package. Treatment with antibiotics or other prophylactic measures is not indicated or necessary until the results of the testing is available or unless specifically recommended by the ISDH. If any antibiotic treatment or other prophylactic measures are found to be necessary after testing has been done, these measures will be coordinated by the local health department in conjunction with the ISDH.

NOTIFICATION

Notify the following authorities:

Local Law Enforcement:

Name of Agency _____ Tel # _____ or 911

Local Health Department:

Name of Agency _____ Tel # _____

Local Fire Department/Hazmat:

Name of Agency _____ Tel # _____ or 911