



REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA

MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE, WATER AND FORESTRY  
AND  
MINISTRY OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES

JOINT PRESS STATEMENT ON THE SUSPECTED ANTHRAX OUTBREAKS AT  
OTJITANGA VILLAGE IN THE KUNENE REGION AND MUYAKO VILLAGE IN  
THE ZAMBEZI REGION

14 October 2019

**1. INTRODUCTION**

The Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Forestry and the Ministry of Health and Social Services herewith wish to inform all farmers and the general public about the suspected outbreak of Anthrax in livestock at Otjitanga Village in the Epupa constituency of Kunene Region and in hippopotamus at Lake Liambezi in Muyako village in the Zambezi Region.

Livestock deaths suspected to be caused by Anthrax were detected at Otjitanga village in the Kunene region since the 25 September 2019, so far a total of 68 small stock (sheep and goats) died from the population of 1670. While in the Zambezi region, deaths of Hippos at the lake of Liambezi were detected on the 29 August 2019 and this far 39 Hippos out of the estimated population of 110 have died. No cases of suspected anthrax has been reported in livestock residing near the lake Liambezi.

**Report of suspected human cases**

On the 09 of October 2019, Opuwo district in Kunene Region reported one hundred and four (104) suspected cases of human anthrax in Otjitanga Village in Epupa Constituency after the community of Otjitanga village ate or had close contact with and /or consumed meat of suspected Anthrax carcasses of goats and cattle. So far three (3) people have been admitted but no deaths have been reported.

In an unrelated event, Katima Mulilo District in Zambezi Region, also reported suspected Anthrax cases after about eleven (11) people who consumed meat from dead hippos that have died of unknown cause developed lesions on different parts of their bodies.

One person was admitted for treatment but has been since discharged from the hospital. No deaths have been reported.

## 2. GENERAL INFORMATION

Anthrax is a serious infectious disease caused by gram-positive, rod-shaped bacteria known as *Bacillus anthracis*. Anthrax is a zoonotic disease (it can affect animals and humans). Anthrax bacteria can be found naturally in soil and commonly affects domestic and wild animals around the world. Anthrax primarily affects herbivorous mammals (animals that eat plants), although other mammals and some birds have been known to contract it.

## 3. CLINICAL SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS:

### ANTHRAX IN ANIMALS:

- general weakness
- difficult breathing
- staggering, trembling, collapse
- not feeding, drop in milk yield
- abortion
- sudden death without prior signs of sickness
- oozing of dark un-clotting blood from natural openings like mouth, nostrils and anus
- An animal that died of anthrax normally bloats and decompose rapidly

## 4. ANTHRAX IN HUMANS:

Anthrax in humans are characterized by main clinical forms:

The incubation period is usually 1-7 days in gastrointestinal anthrax, 3 weeks for cutaneous anthrax and 42 days for pulmonary anthrax. It is estimated that 2000-20 000 human anthrax cases occur annually worldwide.

- **Cutaneous anthrax** infection enters the body through a cut or other sore on the skin. It's by far the most common route the disease takes. It is also the mildest form of the disease that responds to appropriate treatment. Cutaneous anthrax is rarely fatal.

Signs and symptoms of cutaneous anthrax include:

- A raised, itchy bump resembling an insect bite that quickly develops into a painless sore with a dark centre
- Swelling of the area surrounding the sore and nearby lymph glands

- **Gastrointestinal anthrax** infection begins after eating meat from an infected animal.

Signs and symptoms include:

- Nausea
  - Vomiting
  - Abdominal pain
  - Loss of appetite
  - Fever
  - Severe, bloody diarrhoea in the later stages of the disease
  - Swollen neck
- **Inhalation (pulmonary) anthrax** develops when a person breathes in anthrax spores (a rounded resistant form adopted by a bacterial cell in adverse conditions). It's the deadliest way to contract the disease, and even with treatment, and is often fatal. Initial signs and symptoms of inhalation anthrax include:
    - Flu-like symptoms, such as sore throat, mild fever, fatigue and muscle aches, which may last a few hours or days
    - Mild chest discomfort
    - Shortness of breath
    - Nausea
    - Coughing up blood
    - Painful swallowing

As the disease progresses, a person may experience:

- High fever
- Difficulty in breathing
- Shock
- Meningitis — a potentially life-threatening inflammation of the protective membranes covering the brain and spinal cord.

## 5. MODE OF TRANSMISSION AND PEOPLE AT RISK

- The bacteria that causes Anthrax can be found naturally in the soil and commonly affects domestic and wild animals. The animals can become infected when they ingest spores from contaminated soil, plants or water.
- Anthrax outbreaks in humans are primarily due to outbreaks in animals. Anthrax is typically acquired through contact, work or industrial processing with Anthrax infected animals or animal products.
- Anthrax is generally not transmissible from person to person.
- Anyone who has come in contact with anthrax spores could be at risk of getting sick. The following activities and or professionals are at a greater risk of exposure:
  - People who handle animal products
  - Veterinarians



- Livestock producers
- Travelers
- Laboratory Professionals
- Response workers

## 6. PREVENTION MEASURES

- **Avoid high-risk activities such as:**
  - Eating meat from or direct contact with infected animals or carcasses
- Use proper Personal Protective Equipment when working with infected animals or carcasses
- Post-exposure prophylaxis should be taken if exposure occurs

## 7. ACTIONS TAKEN



- Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Forestry and Ministry of Health and Social Services have taken a 'one health' approach (inter-sectoral collaboration) in response to the two suspected anthrax outbreaks.
- The following measures are being implemented to contain the outbreaks in terms of the Animal Health Act, 2011 (Act No. 1 of 2011):
  - Restriction on animal movements from, within and into the affected areas of Otjitanga village in Kunene Region and Muyako village in the Zambezi region.
  - Disease investigation by veterinary staff within a radius of 30km from affected kraals/area in order to establish the full extent of the outbreaks.
  - Vaccination of susceptible cattle, sheep and goats in and around the affected areas in Kunene and Zambezi region .
  - Disease investigation by officials from the Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Forestry and Ministry of Environment and Tourism in Zambezi region is being conducted in order to establish the full extent of the outbreak.
- Officials from the Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Forestry and the Ministry of Health and Social Services will be conducting joint awareness campaigns in affected areas to educate communities about anthrax.
- Daily active case search and notification of human cases at Sesfontein health centre and Opuwo district hospital.
- Regional and District Health Emergency Committees have been activated in Kunene Region and Zambezi region.
- Technical support teams ( Field epidemiologists from the Namibian Field Epidemiology and Laboratory Training Program) will be dispatched for assistance to the affected regions
- Sensitization of the community health workers on anthrax for continuous health education to the communities.
- Veterinary services officials visited the affected areas and collected animal samples for testing
- Post Exposure Prophylaxis will be administered to the exposed people in the two regions

## 8. THE WAY FORWARD



- Any animal that dies on its own **SHOULD NOT** be touched without protective clothing, opened or eaten, but must be reported to the nearest State Veterinarian or nearest veterinary office (Opuwo State Veterinary Office at telephone number 065-273012 or Katima mulilo State Veterinary Office at telephone number 066-255016).
- Farmers elsewhere are advised to ensure that they vaccinate their livestock annually against anthrax.
- Any person who has been exposed to anthrax (consumed the meat or direct contact with sick animals or carcasses) or show signs and symptoms of anthrax must report to the nearest health facility for evaluation and treatment.
- The Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Forestry, Ministry of Health and Social Services, Ministry of Safety and Security (Namibian Police Force) and Ministry of Environment and Tourism together with the Regional, Local and Traditional Authorities, farmers and other stakeholders will work together to ensure the disposal of anthrax infected carcasses, meat as well as decontamination of spots/areas where carcasses are found.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Forestry and the Ministry of Health and Social Services appeal for the cooperation of all farmers and members of the general public during these outbreaks.

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