

Anthrax in the Northwest Territories

Anthrax is a disease caused by the bacteria *Bacillus anthracis*. Once introduced into an area, anthrax spores can remain viable in the soil for many years.

Under certain environmental conditions, such as wet conditions followed by hot dry weather, the spores become concentrated in low-lying areas. Bison usually contract the disease by inhaling contaminated soil during vigorous wallowing in dust baths.

Symptoms of Anthrax in Bison

- ▶ A diseased bison may appear depressed or indifferent to people. It may have a frothy discharge from the nostrils, and swellings in various parts of the body. Walking can be difficult, and bison may stagger or have stiffed-legged gait. Infected bison usually die within 72-hours and are unable to travel very far from the area where they were infected.
- ▶ Carcasses typically lie on their side in a sawhorse position and are severely bloated. Rigor mortis (stiffness) is sometimes absent and the carcass will decompose faster than normal. Anthrax is not normally spread from animal to animal.
- ▶ People are advised not to approach or touch the carcass.

Public Health Concerns

- ▶ Humans can contract anthrax from contact with infected animals or carcasses.
- ▶ Anthrax can cause skin, respiratory or intestinal infection in humans. Skin infections are the most commonly seen form in people and cause dark pustules on the skin. Anthrax infections can be fatal but can be controlled if promptly treated with antibiotics.

Previous Anthrax Outbreaks in the Northwest Territories:

- ▶ Two anthrax outbreaks have been recorded in the Mackenzie Bison Range (July 1993 and August 2010).
- ▶ Sixteen outbreaks of anthrax in the Slave River Lowlands and Wood Buffalo National Park were recorded between 1962 and 2010.

Anyone who may have been exposed to anthrax should contact local public health officials immediately.

**Anthrax Outbreaks in the NWT and WBNP, 1962 – 2010
Number of Carcasses Found**

Year	Slave River Lowlands	Wood Buffalo National Park	Mackenzie Bison Range	Total
1962	281			281
1963	257	47		304
1964	303	60		363
1967		120		120
1968		1		1
1971	33			33
1978	39	47		86
1991		32		32
1993			172	172
2000		106		106
2001	12	91		103
2006	26	3		29
2007		64		64
2010	46	7	9	62