

# 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, causing dark pustules on the skin, are the most commonly seen form in people causing 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:

- ▶ There has only been one anthrax outbreak in the Mackenzie Bison Sanctuary (July 1993).
- ▶ Fourteen outbreaks of anthrax in the Slave River Lowlands and Wood Buffalo National Park were recorded between 1962 and 2007.

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