

## **HEALTH COMMISSIONER ADVISES PROPER USE OF ANTIBIOTICS**

Because of the recent anthrax cases in Florida and New York, area pharmacists and physicians are receiving increasing requests for medications used to combat the disease. Health Commissioner Walter H. Tsou, MD, MPH, today reminded residents that Anthrax cannot be spread from person to person and urged Philadelphians to adhere to the recommendations of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control Prevention (CDC) regarding the use of antibiotic medications.

Dr. Tsou said, "antibiotics taken to prevent anthrax or diseases caused by other biological agents are only recommended in the event of a confirmed case of the disease". The CDC does not recommend stockpiling antibiotics or the use of antibiotics in the absence of evidence of possible exposure.

Inappropriate antibiotic use may cause side effects such as rash, diarrhea, and allergic reactions and may interfere with the use of other medications.

Unnecessary use of antibiotics can lead to the development of resistant strains of bacteria that cause common infections like pneumonia and ear infections, making them more difficult to treat.

Individuals who stockpile antibiotics risk using expired medications.

Stockpiling can lead to shortages of national and regional supplies for routine or emergency use, delaying treatment of people with illnesses who need the medicine.

Esther Chernak, MD, a medical specialist for the health department's Division of Disease Control said, "the federal government maintains a large stockpile of medications that includes antibiotics which would be effective in a bioterrorist attack. This stockpile would be rapidly available for distribution if necessary." The City of Philadelphia has a plan to obtain and distribute emergency medications from this stockpile in an emergency.

The use of anthrax vaccine is currently restricted to use for the United States Department of Defense personnel who are thought to be at high risk for exposure. Anthrax vaccine requires 6 shots over 18 months and then additional shots to maintain protection. Plans are underway to increase the stockpiles of both smallpox and anthrax vaccine.

The Philadelphia Department of Public Health is conducting ongoing surveillance for infectious diseases that might result from biological weapons. If a bioterrorist event were to occur in Philadelphia, the general public would be informed through the news media and provided with information necessary to protect their health. If antibiotics or vaccine were needed, emergency clinics would be set up throughout the City, and instructions provided on where to obtain these medications.

The best way for residents to protect themselves and their family is to be as prepared as possible for any disaster. More information about biological terrorism and City emergency planning can be obtained from the City's web site at [www.phila.gov](http://www.phila.gov). The web site also offers guidelines for handling suspect letters and packages.

CONTACT: Jeff Moran, 215-685-5685 10/12/01