

DAILY NEWS, SUNDAY, OCTOBER 14, 2001

Bio-terror risk stirs fear in city

By ALISON GENDAR
DAILY NEWS STAFF WRITER

Despite efforts of city officials to urge calm, New Yorkers were caught up yesterday in a wave of fear over deadly anthrax contamination.

Scores of New Yorkers took their coughs to emergency rooms across the city to make sure their flu symptoms weren't the first stages of the disease that recently killed a Florida man.

They called 911 to report suspicious letters and badgered doctors for prescriptions to stockpile anthrax-fighting antibiotics like ciprofloxacin and doxycycline.

Businesses suspended mail-room operations and the U.S. Postal Service advised its carriers not to deliver suspicious packages or letters containing powder.

"Welcome to the world post-9/11. It's a whole different, scarier place," said Marty Goldstein, 32, an investment banker who has tried unsuccessfully to persuade his sister, a doctor, to get him a prescription for Cipro.

"Intellectually, I know I don't have a real risk of getting anthrax. It's more a security blanket, a lucky charm to ward off evil," Goldstein said.

Rudy urges calm

Mayor Giuliani urged New Yorkers not to fear the latest anthrax report or to overreact. The disease was isolated, treatable and under investigation, he said.

New Yorkers, though, were still nervous.

In its early stages, anthrax resembles the flu. Health and city officials said only people who have direct contact with the pathogen face a risk.

But people who normally

would shrug off flu symptoms walked into emergency rooms and called their doctors.

"In these times, you can never be too safe," said Javon Harding, 37, who left St. Vincent's Medical Center in Manhattan yesterday with a Department of Health information packet explaining why his runny nose was only a cold.

Doctors in hospitals across the city gave cold sufferers a briefing on anthrax, updated them about the low risk of contracting the disease and sent them home without antibiotics.

Drug is scarce

Yet in parts of the city, anti-anthrax drugs could not be found.

A Duane Reade pharmacy a block from Penn Station ran out of Cipro before the NBC case was announced.

So had the CVS pharmacy downtown at Nassau and Fulton Sts., where 77-year-old Anna Foulke had tried for two days to get the drug for her 87-year-old sister who is suffering from a bladder infection.

"People with normal . . . problems can't get it because people are panicky," Foulke said.

In Edison, N.J., police evacuated 201 workers from the Ford automotive plant yesterday morning after an employee said he feared he had contracted anthrax. It was not immediately clear what prompted his belief.

Test results are expected today, state Health Department officials said.

CITY_21MC100_011831019