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Pataki defends his haste for Cipro

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ALBANY — Aides to Gov. Pataki yesterday defended his controversial decision to undergo treatment for possible anthrax without being tested for exposure.

Pataki's action, which he publicly disclosed after preliminary testing found anthrax spores in a section of his New York City office on Monday, raised eyebrows in the medical community.

"It would be contrary to the normal medical advice," said Timothy Flaherty, chairman of the board of trustees for the American Medical Association.

CNN medical expert Dr. Sanjay Gupta said on the air that it makes no sense to take the Cipro and not be tested.

Since the anthrax scare began, federal, state and city officials, including Pataki, have strongly urged people not to needlessly take Cipro, a powerful antibiotic.

Yet despite showing no symptoms, the governor on Wednesday said he was taking the drug on the advice of the state health commissioner, Dr. Antonia Novello, a former U.S. surgeon general.

State health officials said the plan to treat Pataki for anthrax without testing him also was made in consultation with the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The state Health Department gave The Post a letter dated Wednesday from the director of the CDC's Center for Infectious Diseases recommending the governor and 69 others who may have been exposed undergo five days of antibiotic treatment as a precautionary measure.

"I think if the head of the CDC gave you a recommendation, you'd follow it," said Health Department spokesman Jon Signor.

Taking Cipro without being sick can cause side effects, such as nausea, diarrhea, vomiting and headaches, and also lessen the effectiveness of the drug in fighting anthrax, doctors say.

Mayor Giuliani said he has rejected advice from those who urged him to take Cipro as a precaution.

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