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New anthrax hits Post

Letter sent from N.J.

By MAKI BECKER and ALISON GENDAR
DAILY NEWS STAFF WRITERS

An unopened letter to the New York Post sent from Trenton tested positive for anthrax, police and federal authorities said last night.

The letter, dated Sept. 18 and addressed to "Editor, New York Post," contained "a small amount of powdery substance," according to the newspaper and the police.

The handwriting on the disease-laced letter was "similar to earlier letters sent to NBC television in New York and Sen. Tom Daschle's office in Washington," police said. Those letters also had a Trenton postmark, and the one to Brokaw was sent the same day, Sept. 18.

An assistant to NBC anchorman Tom Brokaw has contracted the skin form of anthrax. Thirty-one people at the Capitol complex in Washington, including aides to Senate Majority Leader Daschle and five Capitol police officers, have tested positive for exposure to the disease.

On Friday, officials confirmed that Johanna Huden, 30, an assistant to the editorial page editor at the Post, was recovering from the skin form of anthrax.

After investigators found the Post letter Friday night, it was taken to the Maryland offices of the U.S. Army Medical Research for Infectious Diseases.

Huden recalled that she had opened another letter addressed in block capitals, the Post said in today's editions.

The number of confirmed anthrax cases nationwide held at eight yesterday, two of them Trenton postal workers.

Mostly negative

More than 200 postal employees in the New Jersey capital lined up all day yesterday for antibiotics at a hospital near the tainted post office.

Yet even as more people downed anti-anthrax drugs as a precaution, most tests across the region were coming back negative for disease-causing spores.

Environmental samples taken at Gov. Pataki's Manhattan offices on Third Ave. have turned up no sign of anthrax. An initial test found traces of the disease in a state police security room at the office.

The results of about 130 of 140 samples have been negative, Pataki spokeswoman Mollie Fullington said yesterday. The remaining results will be available today.

Tests also showed no signs of anthrax in a suspicious letter received by The New York Times' Rio de Janeiro bureau, Brazilian authorities said yesterday.

Times spokeswoman Catherine Mathis confirmed that anthrax was not found on the letter, but said "some contaminant" was discovered on it. The letter was turned over to authorities, unopened. Mathis said further tests would be conducted.

Late Friday, the New York State Health Department announced that tests at ABC-TV in New York and the state Capitol in Albany came back negative for anthrax.

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