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Media Outlets, Governor's Office and Postal Center Feel the Brunt

By ERIC LIPTON

It began on Oct. 12, a Friday, when New York City officials announced that an NBC aide who handles mail for Tom Brokaw had tested positive for anthrax infection. Health officials said at the time that they hoped that the case was isolated.

But as October comes to a close, seven other New York City residents have now been listed as probable victims of the disease, including a 7-month-old infant from Manhattan and a 61-year-old Bronx woman who is struggling to stay alive.

Citywide, tests have found evidence or suggested the presence of anthrax spores in five places: NBC News offices at 30 Rockefeller Plaza, the office of The New York Post at 1211 Avenue of Americas, CBS News at 524 West 57th Street, Gov. George E. Pataki's office at 633 Third Avenue and most recently at the United States Postal Service's Morgan Processing and Distribution Center at 29th Street and Ninth Avenue.

At first the New York anthrax scare seemed to be confined to major television networks. Two aides to Mr. Brokaw at NBC and one to Dan Rather at CBS were listed as having suspected cases of cutaneous anthrax.

In addition, the 7-month-old child of an ABC news producer was confirmed to be infected, with investigators speculating that the boy contracted the disease after going with his mother to a child's birthday party at the network's offices at 47 West 66th Street in late September.

On Oct. 19, it was learned that an assistant to an editorial page editor at The New York Post had the disease. In the days afterward, two other Post employees were listed as suspected victims.

Each of these New York cases, at least at the early stage, had a number of factors in common. All seven of the victims had the skin form of anthrax, a less severe and more easily treatable illness than inhalation anthrax. They first exhibited symptoms in late September, although the diagnosis of anthrax was not made until mid-October.

And in the NBC, CBS and New York Post cases, each of the employees who fell ill routinely handled mail addressed to senior news officials or worked in the area where the letters were sent. In the cases of NBC and the Post, letters were actually found that were contaminated with anthrax.

But even before all of the television or newspaper-related cases surfaced, there were already signs that the anthrax threat had spread wider.

First, officials announced on Oct. 17 that they had found trace amounts of anthrax at Mr. Pataki's Third Avenue office, near Grand Central Terminal, although the governor and no one on his staff has showed signs of infection or tested positive. City officials speculated that one of the governor's police guards may have accidentally carried the small amount of anthrax back to the office after visiting ABC or NBC studios recently.

Less than a week later, federal officials announced that anthrax had been found at the Postal Service's Morgan Processing and Distribution Center, on four high-speed sorting machines. The center is the city's largest, processing two million pieces of mail a day with about 5,500 workers. But tests so far have not shown that any workers are infected.

For a long while, then, city officials were reassured that all of the anthrax cases had been cutaneous, or skin-related, a much more treatable form of the disease. Mayor Rudolph W. Giuliani urged city residents not to overreact.

But late Monday night, the mayor announced that the list of anthrax cases in New York had grown yet again. This time it was outside of mail workers and the news media. And for the first time in New York City, it was a case of inhalation anthrax, with a 61-year-old woman in critical condition.

The Bronx woman worked in a basement stockroom at the Manhattan Eye, Ear and Throat Hospital on East 64th Street, but did not routinely handle mail. Environmental tests completed by Tuesday morning showed no signs of anthrax at the hospital mailroom. The result was a mystery as to how the woman got the disease. And the mayor was suddenly blunt in acknowledging that the whole matter had suddenly turned more serious.



Associated Press

Dan Rather became the news when anthrax was confirmed to be present in his offices at CBS in Manhattan.

ERIN O'CONNOR

An assistant at NBC News, Ms. O'Connor, 38, developed a skin rash around Oct. 1 and learned that she had cutaneous anthrax on Oct. 12. She is expected to recover fully.

7-MONTH-OLD INFANT

The unidentified parents, one of whom is an ABC News producer, were told that the baby had cutaneous anthrax on Oct. 15., although he had first shown symptoms after he visited the ABC offices with his mother more than two weeks earlier. He was hospitalized in serious condition but has since recovered.

CLAIRE FLETCHER

Ms. Fletcher, 27, an aide to Dan Rather at CBS News, noticed what she thought was a mosquito bite on Oct. 1. The spot on her cheek swelled and on Oct. 18 she found out that she had cutaneous anthrax. She is fine.

JOHANNA HUDEN

An assistant to the editorial page editor of The New York Post, Ms. Huden, 30, was treated with antibiotics for fever and an infected finger weeks before she found out it was caused by skin anthrax. She has since recovered.

KATHY T. NGUYEN

Ms. Nguyen, a 61-year-old Bronx woman, works at Manhattan Eye, Ear and Throat Hospital. She developed flu-like symptoms last Thursday, and after her condition deteriorated, officials diagnosed her condition as inhalation anthrax. She was in critical condition last night in Lenox Hill Hospital.

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