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Feds link Conn., Bronx anthrax deaths to mail

By LARRY CELONA and KATE SHEEHY

Authorities say all evidence points to cross-contaminated mail as the culprit in two anthrax fatalities — and they fear thousands of other letters were tainted.

Envelopes that passed through a Trenton, N.J., processing station have picked up and spread deadly spores.

"There seems to be the potential for not just hundreds and not just thousands, but tens of thousands and maybe more letters to be potentially at risk for some level of cross-contamination," said Dr. Jeffrey Koplan, director of the federal Centers for Disease Control.

But Koplan added that, as it's been eight weeks since Trenton was contaminated, every passing day without a new case is evidence the risk is diminishing.

Cross-contamination is the top theory in the mystery death of hospital clerk Kathy Nguyen, who lived in The Bronx.

Officials said 94-year-old Connecticut widow Ottilie Lundgren also apparently inhaled a fatal dose of bacteria after her mail was contaminated in Trenton.

"I'm happy that we can tell the American people that part of the mystery's been solved," said U.S. Health and Human Services Secretary Tommy Thompson.

"But, at the same time, I'm concerned about the cross-contamination ... where's the next cross-contamination going to take place?"

Authorities have settled on cross-contamination in the Nguyen and Lundgren cases through a process of elimination, but they haven't come up with a specific tainted letter received by either woman.

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