Clinical Algorithm: Clinical Evaluation and Management of Drug Users with Possible Anthrax

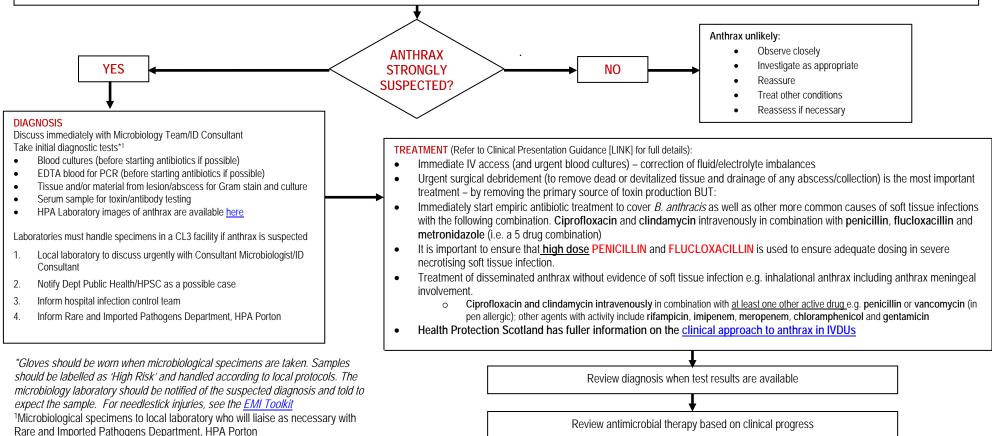


Any drug user who presents with:

- Severe soft tissue infection, including possible necrotizing fasciitis or cellulitis/abscess particularly if associated with tissue oedema (often marked). This can present as compartment syndrome
- Signs of severe sepsis even without evidence of soft tissue infection
- Meningitis (particularly haemorrhagic meningitis). Also be suspicious if drug users present/have CT evidence suggestive of subarachnoid haemorrhage/intracranial bleed.
- Signs and symptoms of inhalational anthrax
 - o Flu-like illness, progressing to severe respiratory difficulties and shock
 - o Chext x-ray signs (pleaural effusions, mediastinal widening, paratracheal fullness, hilar fullness, parenchymal infiltrates)
 - o Progressively enlarging haemorrhagic pleural effusions are a consistent feature
- Respiratory symptoms may also be accompanied by signs and symptoms suggesting meningitis or intracranial bleeding in the rapidly advancing stages of the disease process due to haematogenous spread
- Cases of disseminated anthrax whether 'injectional' or inhalational may present with a variety of symptoms such as abdominal pain, nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea, gastrointestinal haemorrhage, ascites etc., suggestive of either GI involvement or actual gastrointestinal anthrax

NB: - IVDU may also present with the signs/symptoms of classical cutaneous anthrax. In the recent UK outbreak, the presentation has been of mainly soft tissue sepsis rather than classical eschar formation.

- While diagnostic imaging provides important evidence of extent of involvement, it should not be allowed to delay potentially life (or limb) -saving surgical intervention



Adapted from Clinical algorithm: clinical evaluation and management of drug users with possible anthrax (HPA, London) Further information on the Management of IVDUs presenting with features suggestive of B. anthracis infection can be found on the HPSC website at [www.address] HSE-Health Protection Surveillance Centre (HPSC) 5:-27 Middle Gardiner Street, Dublin 1, Ireland. Fax: +353 1 856 1299

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