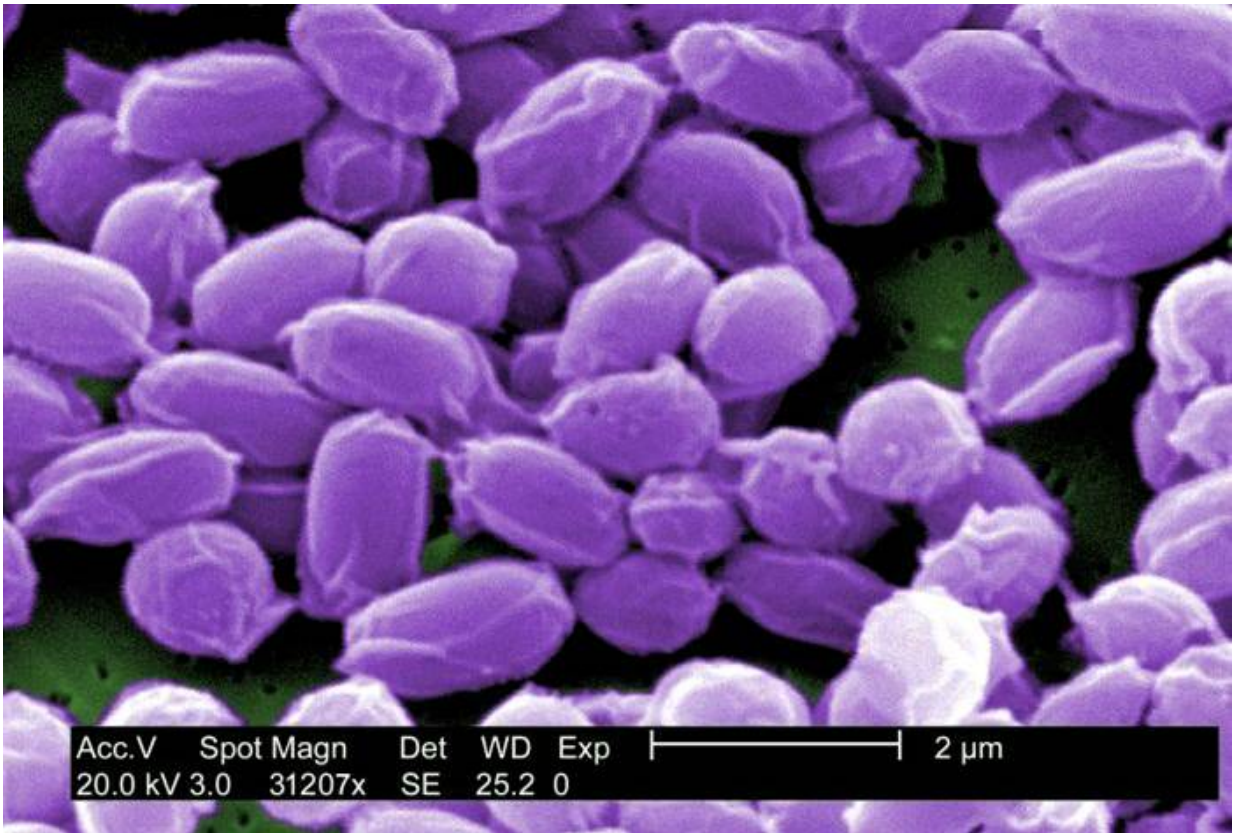


Anthrax outbreak kills 50 cattle and a moose in Wyoming, officials say

September 6 2024, by Brooke Baitinger, The Charlotte Observer



Spores of the anthrax bacteria (*Bacillus anthracis*). Credit: CDC

Dozens of cattle and a moose dropped dead amid an anthrax outbreak in southeastern Wyoming, officials say.

The [bacterial disease](#) was detected in multiple beef herds for the first time since the 1970s and in a moose for the first time since 1956, state [livestock](#) and wildlife officials said in news releases.

The Wyoming State Veterinary Laboratory confirmed the disease in several cattle herds near Elk Mountain in Carbon County on Aug. 31, the Wyoming Livestock Board said in a Sept. 3 release.

"We have approximately 50 to 60 head that have died at this time due to anthrax," Wyoming State Veterinarian Dr. Hallie Hasel told Cowboy State Daily. "It's in a localized region at this time, but we are still investigating, and there could be other losses that we don't know of quite yet."

The laboratory then confirmed a case of a dead moose in the area on Sept. 3, the Wyoming Game and Fish Department said in a release.

The spore-forming bacteria occurs naturally worldwide and can survive underground for decades until the soil is disturbed by heavy rains or flooding, "resulting in sporadic outbreaks," the Wyoming Livestock Board said.

Outbreaks can be more common during the summer "when conditions may alternate between rain and hot, dry weather, allowing spores to be released from contaminated soil and ingested by livestock or wildlife," the Wyoming Fish and Game Department said.

Domestic and wild animals can become infected when they ingest or breathe in spores from contaminated soil, plants or water, the livestock board said. Signs livestock have been infected include "sudden death, weakness, staggering, difficulty breathing, fever, and blood diarrhea."

It can be "transmitted between livestock, wildlife and humans," and is

"most commonly seen in herbivores, including cattle, deer and bison (elk, moose and pronghorn are also susceptible)," the fish and game department said.

"Carnivores tend to be less at risk and may display higher resilience to the disease," the department said.

The case in the dead moose is the only known one documented in wildlife, the department said. The last case in 1956 was in Sublette County, about a 240-mile drive northwest of Carbon County.

Because it's a [zoonotic disease](#), meaning it can be transmitted between animals and people, anyone who has been around animals that could have been infected should be cautious, including hunters, livestock producers and private veterinarians, the agencies said.

"Anthrax vaccine is approved for multiple livestock species and (is) highly effective," the livestock board said.

And although "human cases are rare," hunters, livestock producers and the public should avoid dead cattle or wildlife and should not approach, handle or move carcasses, the fish and game department said.

Hunters should take extra care not to harvest an animal that looks like it might be sick, the department said. Early signs of anthrax might show up as respiratory or breathing difficulty and disorientation.

Infected animals will bloat very quickly after death, and black, tarry blood may ooze from "natural body openings (e.g., nose, mouth, anus)," the department said.

Hunters should wear gloves while field dressing or handling their kill, and no one should pick up roadkill or "fresh deadheads"—big game

skulls with antlers still attached—in the Elk Mountain area, the department said.

Hunters who encounter dead wildlife should note the location or record a GPS pin and report it to the game and fish department by calling its health laboratory at 307-745-5865 or submitting a wildlife disease incident online.

People should keep dogs, horses, and other pets away from animal carcasses, the department said. Anyone who thinks they might have come in contact with an infected animal should notify the Wyoming Department of Health and seek medical attention.

The fish and game department will keep [hunters](#) updated on changes that require further action via email and posts on its website.

Elk Mountain is about a 56-mile drive northwest from Laramie.

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