Uncovering a Dangerous Meat Market Tied to Anthrax Outbreaks

3-minute video

On-screen text: UGANDA

On-screen text: Uncovering a Dangerous Meat Market Tied to Anthrax Outbreaks

On-screen text: CDC Around the World

On-screen text: Julie Harris, Former Field Epidemiology Resident Advisor, CDC Uganda.

Julie Harris: Anthrax is a bacteria and it has tiny spores that can live in the soil. The way that humans typically get anthrax is when they either butcher an animal that has died of anthrax, or they eat the meat of that animal that has died of anthrax.

David Muwanguzi: The symptoms are severe, actually. You find people with wounds, especially on the skin.

Yasiini Nuwamanya: It’s indeed a serious problem in Uganda.

On-screen text: Yasiini Nuwamanya, Epidemiologist, Uganda Ministry of Health

Yasiini Nuwamanya: Apart from causing illness and death among the people in the affected areas, it also disrupts their economic activities, so there is loss of lives, in addition to loss of livelihood.

Julie Harris: It's not legal to butcher animals that die suddenly or are sick. The real problem is that you don't know which animals have died of anthrax and which have not.

Yasiini Nuwamanya: On the 16th of April, 2023, the Ministry of Health received a notification from Ibanda District about an outbreak of anthrax, where six cases had been confirmed, including one death. CDC, through the Uganda National Institute of Public Health, deployed fellows from the Field Epidemiology Training Program to support the district in investigating and responding to the outbreak.

On-screen text: David Muwanguzi, Anthrax Incident Commander, Uganda Ministry of Health

David Muwanguzi: Where we may not have the immediate resources to deploy, we usually depend on the fellowship program.

Julie Harris: In previous anthrax outbreak investigations, we usually stop at that point where we find, eating meat from an animal that died suddenly was associated with infection, and what was unusual about this outbreak investigation is that the team took it a step further. They actually went out to say, “Where did this meat come from?” and while they were doing that, they found that there was an entire black market for low quality meat.

David Muwanguzi: They gave us evidence about the networks, and they were able to give the district

a debrief, and the district was able to respond.

Yasiini Nuwamanya: We made recommendations to the district task force, including prohibiting the illegal meat trade in the affected area, and educating the community about anthrax and the dangers of handling and eating meat from animals found dead.

David Muwanguzi: We see that there is a change as a result of implementing some of these findings and the recommendations arising out of the findings.

Julie Harris: Going deeper into these investigations is so important for us to really be able to effectively stop the outbreaks.

Yasiini Nuwamanya: The anthrax outbreak was controlled within two weeks following implementation of our recommendations, and the findings of our investigation in regards to the role of illegal meat dealers have since informed the subsequent investigations of anthrax outbreaks in Uganda.

David Muwanguzi: To me that was very positive, something that we can actually cut across in other districts for other zoonotic diseases.

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