

Stand-up Talk - April 16, 2013

You probably saw news reports yesterday about a letter to Senator Roger Wicker of Mississippi containing a powder that preliminary on-site testing suggested might be a poisonous chemical called ricin.

Such preliminary tests are not definitive; instead, they require more detailed analysis in specially equipped laboratories to either confirm their results or rule out cause for concern.

The necessary follow-up testing is underway. The suspect envelope and the remaining powder have been sent to leading public health laboratories. We expect results within the next day or two.

We have no reason to believe that any Postal employees are at risk from handling the suspect letter as it passed through the mail stream from Memphis, Tennessee to Washington, D.C.

If anyone were to inhale a quantity of ricin large enough to produce medical symptoms, they most likely would include fever, cough, and difficulty breathing and would appear within 24 hours.

If you have not experienced such symptoms recently, you should not be concerned.

If you have, we urge you to let your supervisor know and see your physician promptly for an evaluation.

Physicians treat the symptoms with supportive care similar to the way they would treat the flu – bed rest, management of fever, and temporary breathing assistance if needed. As with other medical issues, the sooner physicians begin supportive care, the better the results.

As the detailed laboratory testing proceeds, we are being vigilant and will keep you informed and will update our guidance should new information warrant a change in this guidance.

Additional information about ricin is available on the website of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).