

PUBLIC HEALTH FACT SHEET



Plague

What is Plague?

Plague is a contagious disease caused by a germ found in rodents and their fleas. There are bubonic and pneumonic kinds of Plague. Bubonic Plague, the most common naturally occurring type, causes an infection of the lymph nodes. Pneumonic Plague, the type most likely used in warfare, causes a lung infection.

How do you get Plague?

Flea bites spread Bubonic Plague. You can also get Plague from direct contact with infected animals. It is not usually spread from person to person. This infection can travel through the blood stream to the lungs, causing Pneumonic Plague. Pneumonic Plague may easily be spread by being close to an ill person who is talking, coughing, and sneezing. Most cases of Plague occur in the southwestern United States.

When do the first signs of illness appear?

Illness occurs within 2 to 8 days if the infection is from a flea bite and within 1 to 3 days if the infection is from airborne exposure.

What are the symptoms of Plague?

Bubonic Plague symptoms include fever, weakness, headache, cough, sore throat and nausea. A sore at the site of the flea bite may appear. Infection can then spread to the blood, lungs and other areas of the body. Pneumonic Plague symptoms include fever, headache, weakness, and a cough with bloody or watery mucous.

What is the treatment for Plague?

Plague can be treated with antibiotics (such as streptomycin, tetracycline, and chloramphenicol) in the early stages. If not treated, pneumonia, shock, internal bleeding, and death can occur.

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How can Plague be prevented?

- Avoid contact with rodents and their fleas.
- Avoid contact with sores caused by Bubonic Plague and exposure to patients with Pneumonic Plague.
- Antibiotics (such as ciprofloxacin, doxycycline, chloramphenicol, or some sulfonamides) will protect persons who have had face to face contact with persons who are ill with Pneumonic Plague.
- Rat-proof buildings by sealing stored food and closing holes into buildings.
- Avoid flea bites by use of insecticide and repellents.
- Treat dogs and cats in affected areas with flea repellents.
- Wear gloves when handling wild life.

There is no vaccine to prevent Plague.

For more information on Plague, call (248) 858-1406 or toll free 1 (800) 848-5533.

For additional copies, visit our website at www.oakgov.com/health or contact:

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