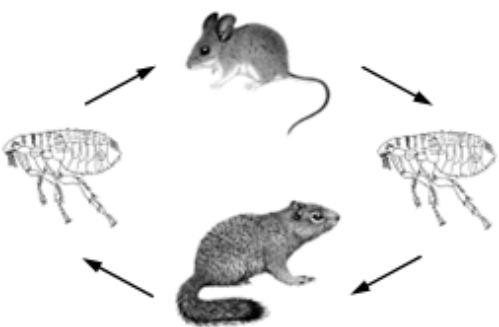


What is Plague?



Plague is a disease of wild rodents and rabbits caused by the bacterium *Yersinia pestis*. It is spread among animals and to humans by the bites of infected fleas. Animals most often infected include rock squirrels, prairie dogs, pack rats, chipmunks, rabbits and mice.

When an animal with plague dies, the infected fleas must find a new host. This may be another rodent, a pet or a person.

Although most human plague cases result from flea bites, people have also contracted the disease by coming into direct contact with an infected animal's blood or tissues, such as when skinning a rabbit or other game.

People can also get plague by inhaling infectious droplets expelled by a person or cat with pneumonic plague.



The three forms of plague are bubonic ...

Symptoms usually develop within two to six days after a flea bite or contact with an infected animal and include high fever, chills, weakness, headache and muscle aches. In bubonic plague, a lymph node in the groin, armpit or neck becomes swollen and very painful.

... septicemic ...

Sometimes the bacteria go directly into the blood and there are no swollen lymph nodes, just fever and severe flu-like symptoms. Secondary septicemic plague can result from untreated bubonic plague.

... and pneumonic.

If the bacteria invade the lungs, pneumonia may develop and the disease may be spread to other people when the patient coughs or sneezes. For plague pneumonia patients, the death rate is over 50%.



Plague is curable if treated in time.

See your doctor immediately about any illness having sudden onset of high fever. Report if you have had flea bites, have handled any wild rodents or rabbits, or have a pet that hunts. Plague is curable with antibiotics if promptly diagnosed and treated.

Pets that hunt may bring plague-infected fleas into the home and can also become infected with plague. Cats are more likely than dogs to get sick, and can spread the disease to their owners through biting, coughing, or draining abscesses. Take your pet to the vet immediately if it has had contact with rodents and develops symptoms of fever, lethargy, and loss of appetite.

Preventing Plague

- ◆ Avoid contact with wild rodents and their fleas, nests and burrows.
- ◆ Prevent pets from hunting.
- ◆ Treat outdoor pets with flea control products regularly.
- ◆ Wear rubber gloves when handling game.
- ◆ Eliminate rodent shelter around the home:
- ◆ Stack woodpiles at least 12" above the ground and 100 feet from the house;
- ◆ Keep animal feed in rodent-proof containers;
- ◆ Get rid of junk piles and abandoned vehicles around the home.
- ◆ Report sick or dead rodents and rabbits (in the absence of poisoning or trauma) to the Zoonoses Program in the New Mexico Department of Health. (Within Bernalillo County, contact the Albuquerque Environmental Health Dept.)

**For more information,
contact:**

**New Mexico
Department of Health
Zoonotic Disease Team**

**833-SWNURSE
(833-796-8773)**



PLAGUE IN NEW MEXICO



New Mexico Department of Health
Center for Health Protection