

3 Tips to Keep Safe from Plague

Read the tips below to learn how you can keep your family and pets safe from plague.

Tip #1:

Avoid contact with rodents and their fleas.

Tip #2:

Get rid of places where rodents and stray animals sleep, hide, or find food around your home.

Tip #3:

Use flea control products when outdoors and for your pets.

Who do I call if I need more information?

If your doctor has questions about plague, call:

- Acute Communicable Disease Program: (213) 240-7941

If you have concerns about your pets, call:

- Veterinary Public Health: (213) 989-7060

If you think you have a rodent problem, call:

- Environmental Health Vector Management Program: (626) 430-5450

**Los Angeles County,
Department of Public Health**
www.publichealth.lacounty.gov



Plague

Tips to keep your family and pets healthy.



What is plague?

Plague in humans is a very rare but serious disease. It's caused by bacteria (germs) that mostly affects wild rodents (e.g. ground squirrels, chipmunks, and rats). Humans and pets can get sick if they visit or live in areas where rodents have just died from plague.

How common is plague?

Plague is very rare in humans. It does happen naturally in the western United States, in places like Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico, and Utah. In California, plague is more common in the foothills and mountains and less likely along the coast. In LA County, wild rodents in rural areas may carry plague germs (e.g. rural recreational and wilderness areas of the Angeles National Forest, Santa Monica and San Gabriel mountains).

How is plague spread?

Plague most often spreads when people get bit by an infected flea. Less often, it's spread by direct contact with the infected rodent (e.g. touching their fur or body fluids). Plague very rarely spreads from person-to-person and may only happen when a person or animal breathes in the cough or sneeze droplets of a patient with severe plague pneumonia. Less than one case each year in the U.S. has come from contact with a cat or dog infected by a rodent.

What are the symptoms?

Signs can start 1 to 8 days after contact with plague. Most people have high fever, headache, chills, body aches, and then get swollen, tender, and painful lymph nodes lymph nodes in the neck, armpit or groin (bubonic plague). Less often, people have low blood pressure, severe lung and kidney disease (septicemic plague) or cough, difficult breathing, and bloody mucus (pneumonic plague).

How is plague diagnosed and treated?

Plague is diagnosed by physical exam if someone has swollen lymph nodes and by lab tests of blood or lymph node fluid. History of being in an area and having close contact with rodents (touching or feeding) supports the diagnosis. Plague is treated with certain antibiotics (medicine that kills bacteria). Sometimes, infected lymph nodes are drained. With treatment, people with plague usually get better.



How is plague prevented?

Tip #1: Avoid contact with rodents and their fleas.

Never feed squirrels, chipmunks, or other wild rodents. Don't touch or let your pet touch sick or dead rodents. Report dead or sick rodents to park rangers or health authorities. Don't walk, hike, or camp near rodent burrows.

Tip #2: Get rid of places where rodents and stray animals sleep, hide, or find food around your home.

Fleas like to live where animals nest. Stop rodents and stray cats from nesting in crawl spaces, attics, or under decks. Clear your yard of heavy bushes. Call your local animal control office instead of trapping any wild or stray animals. Don't move them to other places since this can spread disease. Pick up all fallen fruit from your yard. Don't feed them or leave pet food outside. Put trash in cans with secure lids.

Tip #3: Use flea control products when outdoors and for your pets.

Many products are available for flea control. Use each product safely by following its label. Be aware that some products made for dogs are harmful to cats. Talk to your veterinarian about what flea control product is best for your pet. Wear pants tucked into socks or boots and spray insect repellent with DEET on socks and pant cuffs.