

## District Health Department #10

# Plague

***What is Plague?***

Plague is a disease that affects animals and humans. It is caused by bacteria found in rodents and their fleas. There are three types of plague: bubonic plague, septicemic plague, and pneumonic plague. All three types are caused by the same bacteria, but the modes of transmission and body parts infected are different.

Plague may occur in different forms. Bubonic plague is the most common form, but it is rare in the U.S. Pneumonic plague can be transmitted from person to person through the air and is more deadly, which makes it an effective agent for a bioterrorist attack.

***What are the symptoms of Plague?***

It usually takes one to six days to notice the symptoms of bubonic or pneumonic plague.

Early symptoms include:

- Fever
- Headache
- Weakness
- Rapidly developing pneumonia (pneumonic)
- Cough (with bloody or water sputum)
- Shortness of breath
- Chest pain
- Swollen lymph nodes (bubonic)
- Nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain and diarrhea may occur

Within 2-4 days the pneumonia quickly leads to septic shock.

If bubonic or pneumonic plague goes untreated, it may cause septicemic plague, a severe blood infection. Patients experience fever, chills, tiredness, abdominal pain, shock, and bleeding into the skin and other organs. Untreated septicemic plague is usually fatal.

***How is Plague spread?***

People can get plague several ways:

- By the bites of infected fleas.
- By direct contact with the tissues or body fluid of a plague-infected animal.

- By inhaling infectious airborne droplets from persons or animals, especially cats, with plague pneumonia.
- By laboratory exposure to plague bacteria.
- Inhalation of an aerosol in a bioterrorist attack

***How is Plague prevented?***

There is currently no vaccine available to prevent plague. People having direct and close contact with someone with pneumonic plague should wear tightly fitting surgical masks. Patients with pneumonic plague should be isolated and medically supervised for at least the first 48 hours of antibiotic treatment.

To prevent bubonic plague, reduce the likelihood of being bitten by infected fleas or having direct contact with infected tissues.

***How is Plague treated?***

Early treatment is essential. To reduce the chance of death, antibiotics must be given within 24 hours of the first symptoms. Antibiotics treatment for 7 days will protect people who have had direct, close contact with infected persons.

Source: [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)

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