

Quick Facts

About Plague.

What is plague?

Plague is a bacterial infection caused by *Yersinia pestis*. Plague can be found on every continent except Australia and Antarctica. There are two kinds of plague infection, bubonic (lymph node) and pneumonic (lung).

How is plague spread?

Bubonic plague is spread through bites from plague-infected fleas or insects. Typically, human populations become infected after a large number of rats have died from plague, which forces the movement of the flea population from its natural rat reservoir to humans. Bubonic plague is NOT transmitted from person to person.

Pneumonic plague is classified as primary or secondary. Primary pneumonic plague is spread through close contact with a person or animal infected with pneumonic plague. Typically, it is spread from person to person or animal to person, primarily from the mouth and throat droplets or aerosols from the infected person.

Pneumonic plague IS transmitted from person to person. Secondary pneumonic plague occurs when the bacteria spreads to the lungs through the blood in a person with bubonic plague.

Who is at risk for plague?

Outbreaks in people are usually associated with infected rats and rat fleas that live in the home. This may occur in areas where housing and sanitation conditions are

poor. Cases in the United States are most often in the Southwest and may occur in either rural communities or in cities.

How do I know if I have plague?

Patients develop symptoms of bubonic plague 1-8 days after being bitten by an infected flea. Symptoms include sudden onset of fever, chills, weakness, and a swollen or tender lymph node called a bubo, which usually develops within one day. Buboes typically are found in the groin, armpits, or neck regions and can be very painful. Occasionally some people infected with bubonic plague will develop blood infections.

Patients typically develop symptoms of pneumonic plague 1-4 days after infection. Symptoms of pneumonic plague include severe pneumonia, chest pain, difficulty breathing, cough and coughing up blood.

How can plague be treated?

Bubonic and pneumonic plague can be treated with antibiotics. Pneumonic plague can be more serious and may require advanced supportive medical care and isolation as it IS spread from person to person.

How is plague prevented?

Currently there is no vaccine available to the general public.

You can minimize your risk for infection of bubonic plague through good rodent control efforts and limiting your exposure to rodents and wild animals.

While pneumonic plague is extremely rare, you can limit your risk of exposure by limiting your contact with infected persons and washing your hands frequently.

All information presented is intended for public use. For more information, please refer to:

<http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvbid/plague/index.htm>