

What is plague?

It is a severe disease caused by the bacteria *Yersinia pestis*. Plague is usually carried by rodents and can be spread to humans by fleas. The disease is rare in the United States, but occasionally occurs in the west.

Who is at risk for plague?

Anyone who comes in contact with infected rodents (including rock squirrels, woodrats, and prairie dogs) or fleas from these rodents. It is possible to get plague more than once.

How do you get plague?

It's usually spread to man by a bite from an infected flea, but can also be spread during handling of infected animals and by airborne droplets from humans or animals with plague pneumonia (also called pneumonic plague). Spread of plague droplets on purpose could be used for warfare or terrorism.

Can plague be spread from person to person?

People with plague pneumonia can spread it in airborne droplets.

Can you get plague from household pets or domestic animals?

Domestic cats and dogs can carry infected fleas home to their owners where the fleas can spread plague to people. Dogs and cats can also contract plague after exposure to infected animals or fleas. Cats with plague pneumonia can spread plague directly to people.

What are the symptoms of plague?

Typical symptoms include a swollen, painful lymph node (called a "bubo," hence the term bubonic plague), fever and chills, severe headache, muscle aches, nausea and vomiting. The disease may progress to a blood infection and can lead to pneumonia. People with plague pneumonia can spread the illness to others by coughing.

How soon do symptoms occur?

Symptoms usually begin within 2 - 6 days after a bite from an infected flea or contact with an infected animal. It is important to seek medical care right away.

How is plague treated?

Treatment with antibiotics is very useful, especially if started in the early stages of the disease.

How is the disease diagnosed?

Plague in humans is diagnosed by symptoms, laboratory tests and history of travel to (or living in) areas where plague is found. A sudden increase in plague pneumonia would suggest the bacteria were being used for germ warfare or terrorism.

How can plague be prevented?

In plague areas, flea control for dogs, cats, as well as the home or yard will reduce the number of fleas that could spread the disease. People living in plague areas should control rodents around the home. A vaccine is available for laboratory workers or biologists working in plague areas.