

PLAGUE (BUBONIC AND PNEUMONIC)

What is plague?

Plague is a zoonotic disease (diseases spread from animals to people) caused by a bacteria *Yersinia pestis*. Wild rats and other rodents are the natural reservoir for plague. Cats and dogs can also become infected with plague bacteria. The disease can occur in people if they are bitten by an infected rodent flea or are exposed to infected animals. Plague in persons is rare in Canada.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms usually occur one to six days after a person is infected by the bacteria. Entry of bacteria into the body through the skin may cause bubonic plague. Symptoms of bubonic plague include swollen and tender lymph nodes, fever, chills, muscle aches, headache, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, abdominal pain and extreme exhaustion. Entry of bacteria into the body through the lungs may cause pneumonic plague with symptoms of high fever and shortness of breath. Serious complications from plague infections can develop.

How is plague spread?

People can become infected with plague through bites from infected fleas; this is the most common means of spread. Bacteria can also enter the body through cuts in the skin from direct contact with or handling infected animals. Plague can also be spread by inhaling infected droplets expelled by coughing from a person with pneumonia caused by plague bacteria.

How is plague diagnosed?

Bubonic plague and pneumonic plague are diagnosed by symptoms, history of exposure and laboratory testing.

Who is at risk of plague infections?

People living in areas where plague is present and come in close contact with rodents and infected fleas are at greater risk.

How can plague be prevented?

Practise good personal hygiene. Wash hands thoroughly with soap and water after using the toilet, after handling animals, after handling raw meats and before preparing or eating food.

Follow basic precautions when handling animals. Wear waterproof gloves and thoroughly wash hands after handling.

Control rodents and fleas in areas where plague is present to prevent spread to people. Prevent rodents from infesting the places where you live and work. Seal entry holes and use rodent traps. Prevent flea infestations on cats and dogs.

How is plague treated?

Antibiotics are used to treat plague.

What is the Public Health response?

Health care providers and laboratories must notify cases of bubonic plague and pneumonic plague to Public Health. Public Health staff may interview the health care provider and patient (or caregivers) to find out how the infection occurred, identify other people at risk of infection, implement control measures and provide other advice.

Further Information

For additional information, contact your health-care provider, local [Public Health office](#), or Telecare 811.

Useful websites:

Public Health Agency of Canada
www.phac-aspc.gc.ca