



# PUBLIC FACT SHEET

## PLAGUE

### What is the plague?

Plague is a disease of animals and humans caused by bacteria. It is most commonly found in rodents and their fleas. It is extremely rare in the United States.

There are three main types of plague: bubonic, pneumonic, and septicemic. All three types are caused by the same bacteria, but the methods of transmission and areas of the body infected are different.

### How is plague spread?

Plague may be spread through the following ways:

- Bubonic Plague
  - a bite from infected fleas
  - contact with tissue from infected animals
- Pneumonic Plague
  - spread from person to person through respiratory droplets (cough, sneezes, saliva)
  - usually spread within 6 feet of infected person
- Septicemic Plague
  - occurs when the infection spreads into the bloodstream

Plague could also be used as a weapon of bioterrorism by making the bacteria airborne.

### What are possible symptoms?

Symptoms may include:

- Bubonic Plague
  - chills
  - fever
  - headache
  - muscle pains
  - weakness
  - swollen tender lymph glands
- Pneumonic Plague
  - weakness
  - cough
  - fever
  - shortness of breath
- Septicemic Plague
  - severe generalized sickness

If bubonic or pneumonic plague is left untreated, the bacteria could spread into the bloodstream and cause septicemic plague.

### How is plague diagnosed?

Plague is diagnosed from samples of sputum, blood, spinal fluid, or infected glands.

### What is the treatment for plague?

Antibiotics should be started within the first 24 hours. Plague may cause death if not treated promptly.

### For more information on plague:

Ottawa County Health Department  
[www.miOttawa.org](http://www.miOttawa.org)

Center for Disease Control and Prevention  
[www.bt.cdc.gov/agent/plague/](http://www.bt.cdc.gov/agent/plague/)  
Phone: (888) 246-2675