



Salem/Cumberland County Health Department

PLAGUE

(PUBLIC HANDOUT)

What is plague?

Plague is a disease that affects animals and humans. It is caused by bacteria. There are three different types of plague.

Pneumonic Plague

Pneumonic plague occurs when the bacteria infects the lungs. This type of plague **can** be spread from person to person, through the air. It can also be spread by breathing in the bacteria through air droplets from an infected person. Becoming infected in this way usually requires direct and close contact with the ill person or animal.

Bubonic Plague

Bubonic plague is the most common form of plague. This occurs when an infected flea bites a person or when something with the bacteria on it is exposed to a break in a person's skin. Bubonic plague **does not** spread from person to person.

Septicemic Plague

Septicemic plague occurs when plague bacteria multiply in the blood. It can be a complication of pneumonic or bubonic plague or it can occur by itself. When it occurs alone, it is caused in the same ways as bubonic plague. Septicemic plague **does not** spread from person to person.

What are the symptoms of plague?

Pneumonic Plague

- Fever
- Headache
- Weakness
- Rapidly developing pneumonia with shortness of breath
- Chest pain
- Cough



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The pneumonia will progress for 2-4 days and may cause difficulty breathing and shock. Without early treatment, patients may die.

Bubonic Plague

- Swollen and tender lymph glands
- Fever
- Headache
- Chills
- Weakness

Septicemic Plague

- Fever
- Chills
- Absolute exhaustion
- Abdominal pain
- Shock
- Bleeding into skin and other organs

How is plague spread?

Plague is spread by fleas that become infected with the bacteria that cause plague. Fleas spread the plague bacteria to humans and other mammals through their bite.

Could plague spread from one person to another?

When someone has Pneumonic Plague and coughs, droplets containing the plague bacteria are spread into air, the bacteria can be spread to other non-infected people if they breathe in those droplets of air.

Can plague be fatal?

About 14% (1 in 7) of all cases in the United States are fatal.



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How is plague treated?

Once a person is diagnosed with plague, treatment with an antibiotic should begin as soon as possible.

Who is at risk for getting plague?

Outbreaks in people occur in areas where housing and sanitation conditions are poor. These outbreaks can occur in rural areas and in cities. They are usually linked with infected rats and rat fleas that live in the home.