

# Plague in Animals

## **Q. WHAT IS PLAGUE?**

A. Plague is a disease caused through infection with the bacteria *Yersinia pestis*. Various species of rodents are a natural reservoir for plague in nature.

## **Q. CAN ANIMALS GET PLAGUE?**

A. Yes. More than 200 species of mammals can be infected with plague, although the severity of disease varies widely among species. Many rodents are especially susceptible to infection and disease, while some carnivores, with the exception of cats, are relatively resistant. When exposed, cats are at particular risk for developing severe disease and have been the source of many human infections. Natural infection usually occurs through bites of infected fleas or when an animal eats a rodent infected with PLAGUE. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, a bioterrorism-related outbreak of *Yersinia pestis* would most likely result in an aerosol release of the plague organism and could result in domestic animals getting PLAGUE through:

- Inhaling the primary aerosol;
- Eating food or drinking water contaminated by the aerosol release;
- Eating another infected animal;
- Being bitten by an infective flea.

## **Q. HOW CAN I TELL IF MY PET OR ANIMALS MIGHT BE INFECTED?**

A. Clinical signs of PLAGUE infection in animals can vary greatly, depending on the method of infection (flea bite or inhalation) and the species affected, ranging from no clinical symptoms to sudden death, which is often seen in rodents. In general, symptoms may include fever, enlarged lymph nodes, abscesses, loss of appetite, lethargy, respiratory distress and sudden death.

## **Q. IS THERE A PLAGUE VACCINE FOR ANIMALS?**

A. No.

## **Q. WHAT IS THE TREATMENT FOR PLAGUE IN ANIMALS?**

A. Animals can be treated with antibiotics. Animals should be treated **ONLY** in a veterinary hospital because PLAGUE is highly contagious. **DO NOT** give animals your medication.

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## **Q. CAN ANIMALS WITH PLAGUE TRANSMIT DISEASE TO OTHER ANIMALS OR PEOPLE?**

A. Yes. Animals with pneumonic PLAGUE (infection of the lungs) are very contagious to people and other animals. Cats in particular are very likely to develop pneumonic plague. Sneezing or coughing by an infected animal can spread the bacteria in the air. PLAGUE also can be spread through flea bites or through direct contact with tissue or bodily fluids of PLAGUE-infected animals.

## **Q. WHAT CAN I DO TO PROTECT MY ANIMALS AND MYSELF?**

A. There are a number of things you can do:

- If your pet or animals have been exposed or are sick, call your veterinarian.
- Do not allow your pets to have contact with wild animals or their carcasses.
- Control fleas on your pets and in and around your home.
- If you have to remove a dead rodent or other animal, thoroughly saturate its body with an insecticide prior to handling in order to kill fleas. Do not handle the carcass with bare hands. Wear disposable gloves or use a shovel or other indirect means to handle the carcass.
- Disinfect areas in contact with infected animals using a mixture of one (1) part household bleach in nine (9) parts water. Apply to all surfaces and wash off with water after waiting at least 30 minutes.

## **Q. IF MY ANIMAL DIES FROM PLAGUE, WHAT SHOULD I DO?**

A. Before handling, thoroughly saturate its body with an insecticide to kill fleas.

Burn the carcass or bury it deeply to prevent scavenging by wildlife and other animals. You may want to contact your veterinarian or local animal control to arrange for safe disposal. Contact the Texas Animal Health Commission and the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality for guidance on complying with environmental laws regulating the disposal of animal carcasses.

### **For more information about PLAGUE contact:**

- Texas Department of State Health Services Zoonosis Control 512-458-7255
- DSHS Zoonosis Control Web site: [www.dshs.state.tx.us/idcu/health/zoonosis/](http://www.dshs.state.tx.us/idcu/health/zoonosis/)
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Web site: [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)
- Texas Animal Health Commission Web site: [www.tahc.state.tx.us](http://www.tahc.state.tx.us)