



John Soladay, Director



Martin J. Chávez, Mayor



City of Albuquerque

Environmental Health

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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CONTACT: Dr. Mark DiMenna

(505) 452-5301 office

(505) 263-3299 mobile

City of Albuquerque

Environmental Health Department

Vector-Borne & Zoonotic Disease Division

Bernalillo County's First Human Plague Case of 2009 Confirmed Second Case Possible in Family Member

(Albuquerque) - The City of Albuquerque Vector-Borne & Zoonotic Disease Division has received confirmation of the first human case of plague in a Bernalillo County resident for 2009. The patient, a 16 month old female, is the 5th case of plague in New Mexico in 2009. She is currently hospitalized and recovering from the infection. The patient's great-grandfather is also currently undergoing treatment for plague. He has shown symptoms consistent with plague and is classified as a probable case pending final test results. He will be the state's 6th case of the year.

The first 3 human plague cases this year were from Santa Fe County. One case was fatal, while the others recovered. The fourth case was from Sandoval County, and the patient recovered.

The Vector-Borne & Zoonotic Disease Division operates a joint program with Bernalillo County Environmental Health. Program staff will be conducting an environmental investigation at the site where infection is believed to have occurred. Both patients appear to have been exposed in the East Mountains area of Bernalillo County. The investigation will seek specific exposure details, but all residents of Bernalillo County east of the Sandia Mountains are reminded that the area in which they live is always at-risk for plague, and appropriate preventative measures should be used at all times.

Plague is a bacterial disease found in rodents in the wild. It can occasionally be transmitted to humans, usually through the bite of an infected flea. Symptoms usually appear between 2-7 days after exposure, and can include fever, chills, painful swollen lymph nodes in the neck, armpit or

groin, and occasionally headache, vomiting or diarrhea. Early diagnosis and proper treatment with antibiotics usually lead to successful recovery. Undiagnosed or untreated cases are often fatal.

Family pets can become infected with plague, and may carry infected fleas home to their owners. Dogs may not show symptoms, but cats may develop swollen lymph nodes around the neck, or become lethargic and present with fever or loss of appetite.

According to Dr. Mark DiMenna with the City of Albuquerque, “Many of the plague cases we see result from pets bringing fleas into the home. People living in areas where plague is found are always at-risk, but flea control for pets can help to protect them. Pets should also be kept away from dead rodents or rodent burrows to prevent them from getting infected fleas.”.

Risk of plague infection can be minimized by practicing the following precautions:

- Avoid sick or dead rodents
- Admire wildlife from a distance; do not approach wild rodents or their burrows and do not feed them
- Prevent rodents from living near the house or other buildings; remove trash and weeds and elevate woodpiles
- Prevent pets from roaming or hunting
- Use regular, year-round flea and tick control on pets
- Take sick pets to a veterinarian for diagnosis and treatment

Further information on plague and the Vector-Borne & Zoonotic Disease Division’s plague surveillance program can be obtained by calling 311 or by visiting the Division website:

<http://www.cabq.gov/bdm/plague.html>
