



## **PLAGUE FACT SHEET**

### **WHAT IS PLAGUE?**

Plague is a disease that affects humans and other mammals and is caused by bacteria. Human plague infections continue to occur in the western United States, but many cases are from parts of Africa and Asia.

### **HOW DO YOU GET PLAGUE?**

Humans usually get plague after being bitten by a rodent flea that is carrying the plague bacterium or by handling an animal infected with plague.

### **SYMPTOMS**

Plague symptoms depend on how the infected person was exposed to the plague bacteria:

**Bubonic Plague:** sudden onset of fever, headache, chills, and weakness and one or more swollen, tender and painful lymph nodes

**Septicemic Plague:** fever, chills, extreme weakness, abdominal pain, shock, and possibly bleeding into the skin and other organs. Skin and other tissues may turn black and die, especially on fingers, toes, and the nose.

**Pneumonic Plague:** fever, headache, weakness, and a rapidly developing pneumonia with shortness of breath, chest pain, cough, and sometimes bloody or watery mucus.

### **TREATMENT**

Plague is treated with antibiotics. The earlier a person seeks medical care and receives treatment for plague, the better their chances are of a full recovery. Discuss treatment options with your doctor.

### **PREVENTION**

- Reduce rodent habitat around your home, work place, and recreational areas. Remove brush, rock piles, junk, cluttered firewood, and possible rodent food supplies, such as pet and wild animal food. Make your home and outbuildings rodent-proof.
- Wear gloves if you are handling or skinning potentially infected animals to prevent contact between your skin and the plague bacteria.
- Use repellent if you think you could be exposed to rodent fleas during activities such as camping, hiking, or working outdoors.
- Keep fleas off of your pets by applying flea control products.
- Do not allow dogs or cats that roam free (in areas known to have plague) to sleep on your bed.

### **DPHD EFFORTS:**

Reports of suspected and confirmed cases of disease are made to the Delaware Public Health District (DPHD). The DPHD investigates potential sources of illness, conducts surveillance for the spread of disease, and engages in community outreach and education.