

### What is it?

Plague is caused by the bacterium *Yersinia pestis*.

Plague persists in parts of the world that have populations of wild, infected rodents. These rodents are found in the western United States, South America, and parts of Africa and Asia. Transmission in Canada is extremely rare. The last reported cases occurred in 1924.

### What are the symptoms?

Initial symptoms may include fever, chills, fatigue, muscle aches, nausea, prostration, sore throat and headache. The most common form involves swollen and tender lymph glands that are near the area of a flea bite (usually the groin area). These may burst and drain to the skin surface. All forms of plague may spread in the bloodstream and/or become pneumonia. This can be fatal if left untreated.

### How is it spread?

Fleas become infected by feeding on rats or rodents that are infected with the bacterium *Yersinia pestis*. The bacteria are transmitted to animals and humans by the bite of infected fleas.

Fleas may carry the bacteria for months with the right temperature and humidity. Person-to-person transmission is not usual unless there is direct contact with pus from one of the draining lymph nodes. Pneumonic plague can be spread through coughing.

### How can I prevent it?

People who travel to countries with active plague outbreaks should seek advice from a travel medicine clinic to assess their personal risk. Plague outbreaks abroad are monitored by the Public Health Agency of Canada. Up-to-date situation reports and advice to travellers are available on the Public Health Agency of Canada Travel Medicine Program web page.

### Other Questions?

Talk to your health care provider or call our Communicable Disease Program at 613-966-5500 x349. Toll Free 1-800-267-2803 | TTY Dial 711 (1-800-267-6511) | [www.hpepublichealth.ca](http://www.hpepublichealth.ca)

### References:

1. Ministry of Health & Long-Term Care, DISEASES: Plague, January 2003.

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