

The Los Angeles County Department of Public Health has declared an outbreak of Flea-Borne Typhus in Downtown Los Angeles. As of October 4, 2018, six of the nine cases of the flea-borne disease have been found in persons experiencing homelessness.

WHAT IS FLEA-BORNE TYPHUS?

Flea-borne typhus is a disease that fleas can spread to humans. People get sick when infected flea feces are rubbed into the eyes, cuts, or scrapes in the skin.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS?

Signs of typhus can start within 2 weeks after contact with the infected flea. Many people experience high fever, headache, chills, body aches and pains. A rash can appear on the chest, back, arms, or legs. In **rare** cases, there may be swelling at the lining of the brain (meningitis) and heart valves (endocarditis). Death may occur in very rare cases.

HOW IS TYPHUS SPREAD?

In Los Angeles County, typhus infects the fleas of rats, stray cats, opossums, or other small animals. Typhus spreads when animals and the fleas they carry come into close contact with people. Typhus can spread to other areas when these animals move from place to place. It is not transmissible from person-to-person.

HOW CAN TYPHUS BE PREVENTED?

Practice safe flea control:

- Use flea control products on your pets and yard.
- Keep cats indoors
- Use EPA-registered insect repellent containing DEET labeled for use against fleas when outside.

Avoid being near wild or stray animals:

- Never feed or touch wild animals, especially opossums and stray cats.
- Store your trash in cans with secure lids to avoid attracting animals.
- Close up places where rats and stray animals shelter or find food (i.e., crawl spaces, attics, under decks).
- Wear gloves and mask when cleaning areas where rats and stray animals may have been. Wash your hands when you're finished.

WHAT I NEED TO KNOW...

- Typhus, a flea-borne disease that can spread to humans via exposure to infected animals, has been identified in downtown LA.
- Typhus is not person-to-person transmissible.
- Avoid exposure to fleas. Never pet wild animals or stray cats.
- Symptoms include non-specific illness with fever, headache, myalgia, and rash.



To prevent exposure, never pet wild animals or stray cats.

IS THERE A TREATMENT FOR TYPHUS?

Typhus is diagnosed with a specific blood test. Call your healthcare provider if you think you've been infected. This disease is rarely deadly; however, it is treated only with certain antibiotics. There is currently no vaccine available against typhus in the United States.

REFERENCES

County of Los Angeles Public Health Website -

<http://www.publichealth.lacounty.gov/acd/VectorTyphus.htm>

LA County Public Health Flea-Borne Typhus FAQ - http://www.publichealth.lacounty.gov/acd/docs/TyphusFAQ_English.pdf

Protecting your pets (EPA) - <https://www.epa.gov/pets>

