

NEWS

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Ada County Dog Likely Positive for Plague

Recovering After Prompt Medical Attention

Boise — Nearly two weeks after the confirmation of plague in ground squirrels south of Boise, preliminary tests indicate an Ada County dog likely has the disease. A confirmatory test is in progress and final results are expected in approximately one week.

The dog, which had contact with ground squirrels within the area of impact, south of Boise to the Snake River, and from Kuna to Mountain Home (see enclosed map), became ill the end of May. The owner took the dog to a veterinarian where a sample was taken and submitted to the State Public Health Laboratory for testing. The dog has since been treated and is recovering. Those who handled the dog while it was ill are being monitored and provided preventive medication if needed.

“This is a reminder that people who live and recreate in the area of impact need to take precautions to avoid contact with ground squirrels and their potentially infected fleas. Do not let your dog touch ground squirrels in the affected area. People can be exposed to plague when pets bring infected fleas back into the home, by caring for a sick pet without proper precautions, or by contact with rodents carrying fleas,” said Sarah Correll, Epidemiologist for Central District Health Department.

Plague is a bacterial disease of rodents and is generally transmitted to humans through the bites of infected fleas. It can also be transmitted by direct contact with infected animals, including rodents, wildlife and pets.

To prevent plague, the public health department recommends the following:

- See your doctor about any unexplained illness with a severe fever if you have been in the affected area.
- Avoid picking up or touching dead animals; wear gloves if you must handle dead animals
- Do not let pets sleep in bed with you. This has been shown to increase your risk of getting plague.
- Do not let your pets hunt or roam in the affected area.
- Talk to your veterinarian about using an appropriate flea control product on your pets.
- Clean up areas near the house where rodents could live, such as woodpiles, brush piles, junk and abandoned vehicles.

- Sick pets should be examined promptly by a veterinarian.
- Put hay, wood, and compost piles as far as possible from your home.
- Don't leave your pet's food and water where rodents can get to it.

If you enter the identified Area of Impact, take the proper precautions:

- Wear long-sleeved shirts and long pants.
- Use DEET on clothing in accordance with label instructions or wear clothing pre-treated with permethrin.
- Use DEET on exposed skin, in accordance with label instructions.

Symptoms of Plague

Symptoms of plague in humans include sudden onset of fever, chills, headache, and weakness. In most cases there is a painful swelling of the lymph node in the groin, armpit or neck areas. Plague symptoms in cats and dogs are fever, lethargy and loss of appetite. There may be a swelling in the lymph node under the jaw. With prompt diagnosis and appropriate antibiotic treatment, the fatality rate in people and pets can be greatly reduced. Physicians who suspect plague should promptly report it to their local public health district.

Background

In mid-May, the Idaho Department of Fish and Game collected dead ground squirrels from several areas in Ada County and submitted them to public health laboratories for testing. The laboratory found the plague bacterium. Ground squirrel populations with plague can experience high mortality, sometimes evidenced by large numbers of carcasses. At this time, plague has been detected in ground squirrels — not tree squirrels.

Plague activity can increase in the spring and summer months when rodents are more active. However, wildlife experts say ground squirrels begin hibernating in late June/early July, at which time the threat of plague will decrease.

For more information on plague, including an interactive map of the Area of Impact, visit cdhd.idaho.gov.

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