



Photo Courtesy USAF Airman Shane Phipps

# Ground Squirrels Test Positive for Plague

INFORMATION FROM YOUR HEALTH DEPARTMENT

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June 2015

PLAGUE OCCURS NATURALLY in the western United States. It is transmitted by fleas and cycles among wild rodents. Plague can also infect humans and their pets.

## HOW DO PEOPLE GET PLAGUE?

- Bites of infected fleas
- Touching or skinning infected animals (such as ground squirrels, rats and rabbits)
- Inhaling droplets of the cough of an infected person or animal (especially sick cats)

SYMPTOMS IN HUMANS generally include sudden onset of fever, chills, headache, weakness. Often there is painful swelling of the lymph node in the groin, armpit or neck.

SYMPTOMS IN CATS AND DOGS include fever, tiredness and loss of appetite. There may be a swelling in the lymph node under the jaw.

**IF YOU OR YOUR PET DEVELOP SYMPTOMS OF PLAGUE, SEEK MEDICAL ATTENTION IMMEDIATELY.**

Plague can be treated successfully with antibiotics, but an infected person must be treated promptly to avoid serious complications or death.

## QUESTIONS?

Please contact:  
Central District Health Department  
(208) 327-8625  
cdhd.idaho.gov

Two ground squirrels (whistle pigs) found south of Boise recently tested positive for plague. **To date, no people or other animals have been confirmed with plague.** However, the Central District Health Department is asking area residents and public to take precautions. Ground squirrels typically hibernate in early July, at which time the threat of plague will significantly decrease. You are receiving this notice because your home is in or near the affected area. **Please see the Area of Impact Map on the reverse of this flyer.**

## How can I protect myself and my family from getting plague?

- Remove brush, rock piles, trash, and excess firewood around homes, sheds and garages. This will help prevent rodents from nesting in these areas.
- 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.
- Use insect repellent that includes DEET to prevent flea bites.

## How can I protect my pets from getting plague?

- Treat dogs and cats for fleas regularly.
- Keep pet food in rodent-proof containers.
- Do not allow pets to hunt or roam in rodent habitat.
- Immediately take your pet to the veterinarian if they develop fever, tiredness, and/or loss of appetite after contact with rodents or after hunting.

## What should I do if I find dead ground squirrels near my home?

If you find dead ground squirrels near your home, follow these steps to safely dispose of them:

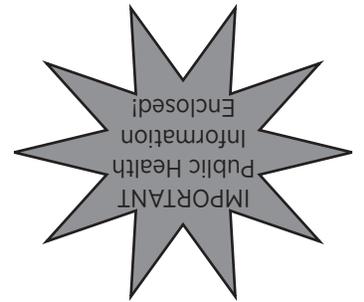
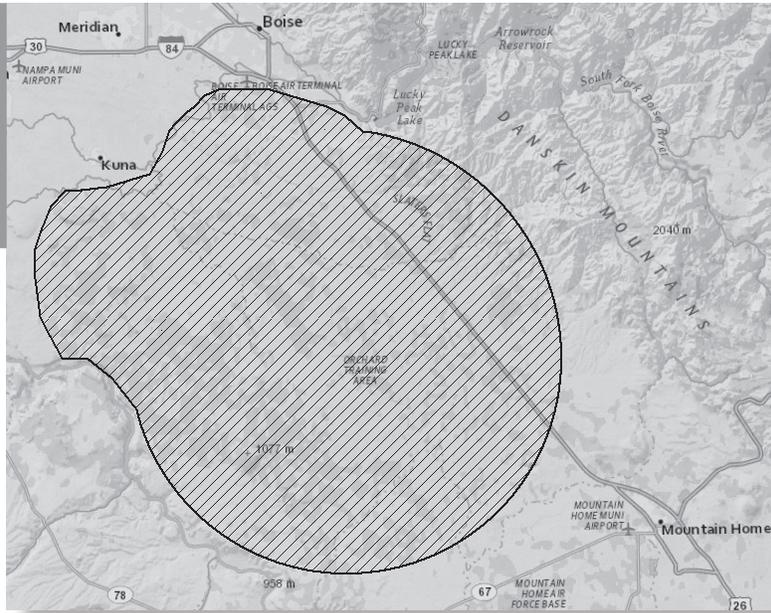
- Wear protective clothing. This includes long sleeves and long pants, boots, and disposable gloves.
- Spray yourself with an insect repellent that includes DEET.
- Use a shovel to put the dead animal in a garbage bag or use a garbage bag turned inside out to pick up the carcass (like picking up dog poop). Without touching the carcass, turn the bag right side out and tie it up. Double bag it and put it in the trash.

## Should I be concerned about tree squirrels in my area?

No, at this time we are only concerned about ground squirrels.

Map of suspected area where plague may be present in wildlife.

A larger full-color map is available at [cdhd.idaho.gov](http://cdhd.idaho.gov)



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DEPARTMENT  
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