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NEWS

DATE: June 12, 2018

Elmore County Child Recovering After Plague Infection

Elmore County — Plague was confirmed this week in an Elmore County child. The child is recovering after receiving antibiotic treatment.

“Plague is spread to humans through a bite from an infected flea. People can decrease their risk by treating their pets for fleas and avoiding contact with wildlife,” said Sarah Correll, D.V.M., Central District Health Department epidemiologist. “Wear insect repellent, long pants and socks when visiting plague affected areas.”

It is not known whether the child was exposed to plague in Idaho or during a recent trip to Oregon. Plague has historically been found in wildlife in both states. Since 1990, eight human cases were confirmed in Oregon and two were confirmed in Idaho.

Plague in humans is rare, but occurs naturally in some rodent populations, including ground squirrels in Idaho. Fleas spread the disease between animals. The disease can also be transmitted to humans by direct contact with infected animals or their fleas. Person-to-person transmission is extremely rare and this case was not a risk to others.

Symptoms of plague usually occur within two to six days of exposure and include sudden onset of fever, chills, headache and weakness. In most cases, there is also a painful swelling of the lymph node in the groin, armpit, or neck. Plague signs in cats and dogs include fever, lethargy and loss of appetite. There may be a swelling in the lymph nodes under the jaw of pets. Prompt diagnosis and appropriate antibiotic treatment can greatly reduce the risk of death in people and pets.

About Plague in Our Area

Plague was identified in 2015 and 2016 in ground squirrels in both Elmore and south Ada counties. However, this season, no ground squirrel die offs or unusual behavior has been reported by state wildlife officials.

Protecting Yourself and Pets

- Don't touch or handle wild rodents or their carcasses.
- Keep your pets from roaming and hunting rodents. This is important – when an animal dies from the plague, fleas leave the body and look for another host, which could be your pet, especially if it rolls in a carcass or eats it.
- Talk to your veterinarian about flea control for your pets before venturing out to ground squirrel areas, and follow the directions on the label. Not all flea products are safe for dogs and cats.
- If you find a group of dead ground squirrels, you can report it to the Idaho Department of Fish and Game on its plague website (<https://idfg.idaho.gov/plague>).
- Don't feed rodents in campgrounds, picnic areas, or near your home.
- Clean up areas near your home where rodents could live.
- Store hay, wood and compost piles as far as possible away from your home.
- Don't leave pet food and water where rodents can get to them.

Media Availability

CDHD epidemiologist, Sarah Correll, will be available for media interviews during the following times. Please coordinate with health department PIO, Christine Myron, by calling 208-327-8639 or by email at cmyron@cdhd.idaho.gov.

- Tuesday, June 12 from 2PM to 5PM
- Wednesday, June 13 from 9AM to 2PM

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