



CITY OF LONG BEACH

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

2525 GRAND AVENUE • LONG BEACH, CALIFORNIA 90815 • (562) 570-4000 • FAX: (562) 570-4049



Information on Murine Typhus (Fleaborne Typhus)

What is murine typhus?

Murine typhus, also called fleaborne or endemic typhus, is a disease caused by the bacterium *Rickettsia typhi*. Most of the murine typhus cases in the United States occur in southern California, south Texas, and also Hawaii.

Where does it come from?

Although rats and their fleas are the natural reservoirs (animals that both maintain and transmit the disease organism) for murine typhus, other animals, such as opossums and domestic cats, may also be involved in the transmission of murine typhus. In fact, studies conducted in Los Angeles County show that cats, cat fleas, and opossums are the primary ways murine typhus is spread in the U.S.

How do I get it?

People get murine typhus from an infected flea. Most fleas expel feces while biting; the feces of infected fleas contain the *Rickettsia* bacteria. They enter the body through the bite wound or from a person scratching the bite area.

Exposure to fleas can occur directly from host animals (rodents, opossums, feral (wild) cats, etc), or indirectly from a pet (cat, dog, etc.) which comes in contact with fleas from the host animals or their harborage areas, and then has contact with the pet owner.

How will I know I have it?

The incubation period for murine typhus is 6 to 14 days. Symptoms of the disease include headache, fever, nausea, and body aches. Five or six days after the initial symptoms, you may get a rash that starts on the trunk of your body and spreads to your arms and legs. If left untreated, the disease may last for several months. A doctor can order blood tests to tell you if you have murine typhus.

What do I do if I get murine typhus?

If you suspect that you have murine typhus, see a doctor as soon as possible. If you wait too long to see a doctor, you may have to be hospitalized. Murine typhus is easily treated with certain antibiotics.

What can I do to prevent murine typhus?

The best way to protect yourself and your family from murine typhus is to:

- Clean your yard so that rodents, opossums, and stray cats cannot live there.
- Remove any brush or trash, keep the grass mowed, and keep firewood off the ground.

CITY OF LONG BEACH

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

Information on Murine Typhus (Fleaborne Typhus) - (*continued*)

- Do not leave pet food out at night as this attracts other animals.
- Prevent rodents from living in your house.
- Treat for fleas before you begin rodent control in your house or yard. Otherwise, when the rodents die, the fleas will search for new hosts, possibly you and your family. There are several commercial flea control products on the market. Pick one and follow the label instructions.
- If you own pets, control the fleas on them regularly. If they come in contact with infected fleas, they could bring them home to you. Ask a veterinarian about flea control products that are safe to use on your pets.

Who can I call if I have questions about murine typhus?

If you have more questions about murine typhus or flea control, consult with a physician or a veterinarian. Questions can also be answered by the Long Beach Department of Health & Human Services Epidemiology Program at (562) 570-4302.

Contact the Health Department's Animal Care Services by email at animalcare@longbeach.gov, if you have questions about managing opossums and stray or feral cats on your property; more information about urban wildlife is available online at: http://www.longbeach.gov/acs/urban_wildlife/default.asp

Report dead opossums or cats to Animal Care Services for removal by calling (562) 570-PETS (7387).