



District Health Department No. 2

Northeast Michigan's Community Health Department

THE PLAGUE WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

WHAT IS PLAGUE?

Pneumonic plague (bubonic plague or septicemic plague) is caused by a bacteria found in rodents and their fleas in many areas around the world. It is very sensitive to sunlight and does not survive long outside the host.

HOW COMMON IS PLAGUE AND WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS?

Plague is not common and resembles other severe respiratory illnesses. It develops life threatening respiratory failure, sepsis and shock. Some signs of plague would be fever, headache, weakness, and cough with bloody sometimes watery sputum. The patient may experience fever, exhaustion, and rapidly developing shortness of breath, chest pain and cough. In 2 to 4 days, the illness may lead to septic shock. Without early treatment, the fatality rate is very high.

HOW IS THE PLAGUE DIAGNOSED?

Testing for the bacteria usually takes from 24 to 48 hours. One specific test may take as little as 2 hours.

CAN PLAGUE BE USED AS A WEAPON?

Terrorists with the equipment and skills necessary to grow cultures of the bacterium could possibly grow large quantities. There are no effective environmental warning systems to detect the bacteria.

IS THERE A TREATMENT FOR PLAGUE?

Yes, there are several antibiotics that can be used to combat plague. Early treatment to the exposed individual is very successful. Medicine needs to be given within 24 hours of first signs of the disease. If plague is diagnosed, all persons who develop fever or cough should seek immediate medical attention.

IS THERE A WAY TO PREVENT INFECTION?

Vaccine against plague does not prevent the development of primary pneumonic plague, and is not presently available in America.

For more information on the Plague, please visit the Center's for Disease Control website at www.cdc.gov or call District Health Department #2 at 1-800-504-2650.