

Transmission

- Bites of infected fleas
- Breathing in droplets from the cough of an infected person or animal (cats)
- Touching or skinning infected live or dead animals (such as rats, rabbits, squirrels or prairie dogs)

Symptoms

- Sudden fever, chills, head and body-aches and weakness, vomiting and nausea.
- Small lumps on the body that are swollen, hard and painful (called “lymph nodes”). These can turn into sores that discharge fluid.
- Stomach pain, shock, and sometimes bleeding into the skin or inside the body; skin may turn black and die, especially on fingers, toes and nose.
- Lung infection that starts very quickly, and causes difficulty with breathing, chest pain, coughing (sometimes of blood or mucous).
- The person may stop breathing; the body may shut down, causing death.

Prevention

- Reduction of rodent habitats
- Social mobilization and behaviour change communication
- Early identification of cases and treatment with antibiotics
- Repair and screening of holes or cracks in houses
- Storage of food in rodent-proof containers
- Use of raised beds or sleeping areas
- Safe handling and disposal of animal carcasses

Vulnerable people

- Everyone in the community is vulnerable to plague
- Young children, older people and people with other illnesses or health conditions may have a higher risk of severe illness

If an epidemic occurs

- Detect plague cases rapidly and refer them to health facilities for early treatment with antibiotics
- Employ social mobilization and behaviour change communication
- Control fleas using environmental and chemical hygiene BEFORE controlling rats (e.g., setting traps)
- Actively search for rat carcasses and dispose of them correctly
- Handle and dispose of animal carcasses safely

- Avoid direct contact with people who have plague (caregivers should remain a distance of at least one metre from persons who are sick)
- Caregivers and health workers should wear personal protective equipment (gloves, mask, gown/apron)
- Isolate patients with pneumonic plague (lung infection)
- Give antibiotics (chemoprophylaxis) to people who have been in close contact with a person who has pneumonic plague
- Repair and screen holes and cracks in walls; store food in rodent-proof containers
- Use raised beds or raise sleeping areas
- Provide safe and dignified burials

Community-based assessment - questions

Make a map of the community and mark the information you gather on the map. Record other details.

- When did people start to fall sick with plague?
- How many people have fallen sick with plague? Where?
- How many people have died? Where?
- How many people live in the affected community or area? How many children under five years of age live in the area?
- Who and where are the vulnerable people?
- What are the community's burial traditions and funeral procedures and practices?
- How do people in the community store their food? (Are rats or other rodents able to eat it?)
- Do people in the community sleep at ground level or on raised beds?
- Do community members have any risky habits or practices when they come into contact with dead or live rodents?
- Are there handwashing facilities in the community or at the health centre? Are soap and water always available?
- Where are the local health facilities and services? (Include traditional and community carers.)
- What are the community's habits, practices and beliefs about caring for and feeding sick people. When babies and infants are sick, do women continue to breastfeed them?
- Is a social mobilization or health promotion programme in place?
- Which sources of information do people use most?
- Are rumours or is misinformation about plague spreading in the community?

Volunteer actions

See the following action tools for more information on what actions to take against plague:

- 1 - Community-based surveillance
- 2 - Community mapping
- 3 - Communicating with the community
- 4 - Referral to health facilities
- 5 - Volunteer protection and safety
- 6 - Using personal protection equipment (PPE) for highly infectious diseases
- 19 - Psychosocial support (Psychological first aid (PFA))
- 20 - Isolating sick people

- 21 - Safe and dignified burials
- 23 - Chemoprophylaxis
- 26 - Coughing etiquette
- 28 - Social distancing
- 29 - Hygiene promotion
- 34 - Handwashing with soap
- 35 - Handwashing in a highly infectious epidemic
- 36 - Vector control
- 38 - Waste disposal and clean-up campaigns
- 39 - Preparing and using disinfectants
- 41 - Handling and slaughtering animals
- 43 - Social mobilization and behaviour change