



COUNTY OF ORANGE HEALTH CARE AGENCY

EPIDEMIOLOGY & ASSESSMENT PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICES

JULIETTE A. POULSON, RN, MN
DIRECTOR

DAVID M. SOULELES, MPH
DEPUTY AGENCY DIRECTOR

DONNA S. FLEMING, MSW, DPA
DIVISION MANAGER
DISEASE CONTROL & EPIDEMIOLOGY

MAILING ADDRESS:
P.O. BOX 6128
SANTA ANA, CA 92706

TELEPHONE: (714) 834-8180
FAX: (714) 834-8196

Endemic (Flea-borne) Typhus Questions and Answers

What is endemic (flea-borne) typhus?

Endemic typhus is a disease caused by bacteria called rickettsiae. Two types of these bacteria, called *Rickettsia typhi* and *Rickettsia felis*, can cause endemic typhus or a typhus-like illness in Southern California. The disease is sometimes also called murine typhus and is found worldwide, mainly in tropical and coastal areas. Today, most cases in the United States are reported from Texas, Hawaii, and Southern California. Prior to 2006, the last reported case in Orange County was in 1993.

How do you get endemic typhus?

Typhus bacteria are transferred to humans usually as the result of flea bites. Infected fleas have the bacteria in their feces and will often defecate while biting and feeding. When a person scratches the flea bite, he/she can allow some of the bacteria in the flea feces to enter the blood stream. People can also be infected by transferring the bacteria to their eye, nose, or mouth.

What animals can carry the typhus bacteria?

Cats, opossums, rats, mice, and other small mammals and their fleas can carry the bacteria in nature.

What are the symptoms of this disease, and how do you treat it?

Infected persons may experience fever, headache, chills, and muscle aches 6 -14 days after contact with an infected flea. A rash that starts several days after the initial symptoms is also common. Nausea, vomiting or cough may also be present. Most illnesses are mild, but about 10% of patients have a more severe illness and need to be hospitalized. Death from typhus is rare. Most persons recover within a few days after starting treatment with antibiotics.

How do you protect yourself from endemic typhus?

Remove pet food and other outside food sources, cover garbage containers, and trim vegetation around buildings to discourage opossums, rodents and stray cats from around your home. If you see live or dead opossums, cats or other animals on your property, call your local Animal Control agency. Keep pet cats indoors as much as possible, and consult your veterinarian about proper flea control on pets.

For more information: Visit www.ochealthinfo.com/epi/typhus/index.htm or call Orange County Epidemiology at 714-834-8180.