



Tarrant County Public Health

A healthier community through leadership in health strategy

The Facts About Murine (flea-borne) Typhus

What is murine (flea-borne) typhus?

Murine typhus is a disease caused by *Rickettsia typhi*. Flea-borne typhus occurs in tropical and subtropical climates around the world where rats and their fleas live. Cat fleas found on domestic cats and opossums have been associated with cases of murine typhus in the United States. Most human cases of flea-borne typhus in the United States occur in California, Hawaii and Texas.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms of flea-borne typhus begin within two weeks after contact with infected fleas. Signs and symptoms may include:

- Fever and chills
- Loss of appetite
- Vomiting
- Cough
- Body aches and muscle pain
- Nausea
- Stomach pain
- Rash (typically occurs around the fifth day of illness)

Most people will recover without treatment, but some cases may be severe. When left untreated, severe illness can cause damage to one or more organs including the liver, kidneys, heart, lungs and brain.

How is it spread?

Murine typhus is spread to people through contact with infected fleas. People get sick with murine typhus when infected flea feces are rubbed into cuts, scrapes in the skin or into an irritated flea bite.

How is it treated?

Murine typhus is effectively treated with the antibiotic doxycycline. Antibiotics are most effective when given soon after symptoms begin. People who are treated early with doxycycline usually recover quickly.

What can I do to prevent murine typhus?

There is no vaccine to prevent murine typhus. Here's how to reduce your risk of getting murine typhus:

- Keep fleas off your pets to avoid contact with infected fleas;
- Keep rodents and wild animals away from your home, pets, workplace and recreational areas;
- Remove brush, rock piles, junk, cluttered firewood, animal feces and food supplies - especially pet food;
- Always wearing gloves if you are handling sick or dead animals; and
- Use EPA-registered insect repellent containing either DEET or permethrin and labeled for use against fleas if you think you could be exposed to fleas during activities such as camping, hiking or working outdoors.

For more information, call 817-321-4700 or visit <http://health.tarrantcounty.com>

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