



Disease Tool 20 Plague

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.

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 (care givers 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.

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.

Volunteer actions

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



Community-based assessment

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 5 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. Do women continue to breastfeed babies and infants when they are sick?
- 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?