



Sam Houston State University

Member The Texas State University System

ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH, SAFETY AND RISK MANAGEMENT

HEALTH ALERT

The Texas Department of State Health Services has issued a health alert due to increased reports of flea-borne (murine) typhus from multiple areas of the state, including increased activity in the Dallas-Fort Worth and Houston areas. Flea-borne typhus is caused by infection, with opossum, rat and cat fleas being the primary carriers. Transmission to humans can occur when infected flea feces are scratched into a bite site or another abrasion in the skin, or rubbed into the conjunctiva (eyes).

Typhus symptoms begin within 2 weeks of contact with infected fleas and include:

- Fever and chills, headache, body aches and pain, loss of appetite, rash, nausea, and vomiting.

Prevention

- Reduce your risk of getting murine typhus by avoiding contact with infected fleas.
- Keep rodents and animals away from your home, workplace and recreational areas and remove brush, rock piles, junk, cluttered firewood and food supplies, especially pet food.
- Always wear gloves if you are handling sick or dead animals.
- Use insect repellent labeled for use against fleas, if you think you could be exposed to fleas during activities such as camping, hiking, or working outdoors.
- Keep fleas off your pets. Use veterinarian-approved flea control products for cats and dogs such as flea collars or spot-ons. Animals that are allowed outside are more likely to come in contact with fleas and could bring them inside.

General Information

- There is no vaccine to prevent murine typhus.
- More than 60% of reported cases of flea-borne typhus require hospitalization.
- 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.
- Typhus can occur in any age group, but over 25% of cases are reported among those 6-15 years of age.

Seek medical attention, if you have come into contact with fleas and exhibit any of the typhus symptoms.

References

www.cdc.gov/typhus/murine/index.html

www.dshs.texas.gov/news/releases/2017/healthalert-11302017.aspx?terms=typhus