Information Sheet on Plague

Madagascar is currently experiencing an outbreak of plague in the major cities such as Antananarivo.

Causative Agent

Plague is an infectious disease caused by the bacteria *Yersinia pestis*, a bacterium, which is usually present in wild rodents and fleas.

Source of Infection and Transmission

It is transmitted:

- To humans by the bite of infected rat fleas
- Direct contact with infected rats
- Person to person through respiratory droplets from a patient having pneumonic plague

Plague Disease Types

**Bubonic:** Bubonic plague is the most common form of plague and is caused by the bite of an infected flea. Plague bacillus, *Y. pestis*, enters the body at the bite site and travels through the lymphatic system to the nearest lymph node where it replicates itself.

**Septicaemic:** Septicaemic plague occurs when infection spreads directly through the bloodstream from infected lymph nodes to other organs.

**Pneumonic:** Pneumonic plague is the most virulent form and is caused by spread to the lungs from advanced bubonic plague. Untreated pneumonic plague carries a high mortality rate. It is also the most contagious form.

Manifestation of the disease

Typical symptoms are the sudden onset of:

- fever
- chills
- headache
- body-ache
- weakness
- nausea and vomiting
- In pneumonic plague, the patient also presents with cough and breathing difficulties.
**Actions to be taken if one presents with the above symptoms**

If a person presenting with the above symptoms has had any contact with a sick patient in an endemic country such as Madagascar, he or she should consult a doctor immediately at the nearest health facility. The doctor should also be informed on previous travel details.

This person should avoid crowds so as not to spread the disease.

**Information Hotline**

A hotline for queries on plague and other communicable diseases is operational from 9am to 4pm on number 8924, Mondays to Fridays.

**Information for Travellers to Madagascar**

Travellers to Madagascar are informed to;

- Avoid crowded places, especially where outbreaks have been reported
- Wear long sleeved shirts, long pants and appropriate footwear to avoid flea bites
- Not to handle dead animals especially rats
- Use insect repellent creams
- Consume food cooked in good hygienic conditions
- Wash both hands regularly with soap and water
- In case the traveller presents with symptoms mentioned above, he or she is advised to consult a doctor immediately
- Contact the International Vaccination Centre at Mutual Aid Building Port-Louis, for prophylactic medication prior to departure

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**Ministry of Health and Quality of Life**

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