

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

Ministry of Health and Quality of Life

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