



## What is Murine typhus?

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- Murine typhus is a disease also known as flea-borne or endemic typhus.
- It is caused by a member of a group of bacteria named *Rickettsia*.
- It is classified as a zoonosis. Zoonoses are diseases of animals that can be transmitted to humans. Many zoonotic diseases require a vector like a mosquito, tick or flea in order to be transmitted from the animal host to the human host.

## How do I get Murine typhus?

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- This disease is not spread from person to person.
- People get murine typhus from an infected flea. Most fleas defecate while biting; the feces of infected fleas contain the rickettsial organism. The rickettsiae enter the body through the bite wound or from a person scratching the bite area. It is possible to get murine typhus by inhaling contaminated, dried flea feces. However, this method of transmission is not as common as transmission from a biting flea.
- Fleas are infected from contact with infected animals. They are infectious for life (approximately one year).
- Animals that can transmit the disease to fleas are:
  - Rats
  - Domestic cats
  - Opossums
  - Racoons
  - Other small mammals

## What are the symptoms?

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- Symptoms may begin 6 to 14 days after exposure.
- Symptoms may include:
  - Fever
  - Headache
  - Vomiting
  - Stomach aches
  - Chills
  - Body aches and pains
  - A rash on the chest, back, arms, and/or legs. The rash does not usually affect the face, palms, or soles.
- Consult your healthcare provider if you are experiencing any of these symptoms and feel that you have been exposed to fleas. Inform your healthcare provider of your possible exposure to fleas because symptoms are shared by many other diseases and can be incorrectly diagnosed if a specific blood test is not performed.
- Illness seldom lasts longer than 2 weeks and is usually much shorter with treatment.

## How is the disease treated?

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- This disease is not vaccine preventable; however, it is readily treatable with the appropriate antibiotic therapy.

## **How will I know if my pet is infected?**

- Infected animals usually do not display symptoms.
- If your pets are infested with fleas, their fleas may become infected and can transmit the disease to you.

## **What steps can I take to prevent my pets and myself from contracting the disease?**

- ***Practice safe flea control***
  - Pets, yards, and homes should be kept free of fleas.
  - Consult your veterinarian regarding oral and topical flea control medications that can be used on pets to control and prevent flea problems.
  - Pesticides are also available to control fleas in your yard and home.
- ***Eliminate possible locations where wild animals may live***
  - Prevent rodents, opossums, and stray feral cats from entering your home by closing any openings found around your home.
  - Yards should be mowed and kept clear of heavy undergrowth and accumulated debris to reduce areas where animals nest or hide.
- ***Eliminate food sources for wild animals***
  - Do not encourage animals to visit your yard by directly or indirectly feeding them.
  - Cover trash cans, and remove bird feeders, fallen fruit, and pet food that attract rodents and other animals.
- ***Take personal precautions***
  - Limit your exposure by avoiding areas that may be infested with fleas and wearing heavy clothing (long sleeved shirts, long pants, socks and shoes) and use insect repellents containing DEET if you will be going to areas where you will be exposed to fleas (high grasses and poorly maintained lots).
  - Avoid any interaction with wild cats. Remember, you don't need to touch the cat to be exposed.
  - Thoroughly clean areas where your pets sleep, play, eat or just lounge around. This will greatly reduce the materials needed for flea development.
  - When cleaning animal nesting areas spray area with disinfectant and wear protective equipment such as particle mask, goggles, and gloves.
  - Wash hands after cleaning.
  - Avoid sweeping, vacuuming, or stirring dust until the area is thoroughly wet with disinfectant or you are wearing protective equipment.

## **How can I obtain additional information?**

- Further inquiries regarding murine typhus may be directed to the Austin/Travis County Health and Human Services Department Epidemiology and Surveillance Unit at (512) 972-5555.
- Additional information may also be found on the Texas Department of State Health Services website: [http://www.dshs.state.tx.us/idcu/disease/murine\\_typhus/information/](http://www.dshs.state.tx.us/idcu/disease/murine_typhus/information/)