



Austin/Travis County Health and Human Services Department

Division of the Medical Director
Epidemiology and Surveillance Unit
15 Waller Street, 4th Floor
Austin, TX 78702



TYPHUS ALERT

Austin/Travis County Health and Human Service Department (A/TCHHSD) is currently experiencing an increase in the number of suspected rickettsial disease reports, specifically murine typhus (aka flea-borne or endemic typhus).

- To date in calendar year 2008, **14 confirmed** typhus cases were identified.
- Zero confirmed typhus cases in Travis County residents were reported during calendar years 1997-2006.
- The confirmed cases reside in the following zip codes: 78703, 78705, 78722, 78723, 78728, 78731, with the majority of cases occurring in 78703.
- All except one of the confirmed cases are male.
- The age range of confirmed cases is between 7 to 62 years old.
- A/TCHHSD is working with the Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to conduct an investigation of these cases to better understand the current environmental factors that may be contributing to disease transmission in Travis County.

A/TCHHSD is seeking your assistance in the management of the current increase of murine typhus cases in our community. The following recommendations are for your consideration and clarification.

- While Typhus is a weekly reportable condition, due to the current increase in cases in Travis County, please **report murine typhus at the time of suspicion** to A/TCHHSD at **(512) 972-5555 through September 2008**. You may also fax in reports to **(512) 972-5772**. Health department staff investigate all typhus reports assessing severity and potential areas of exposures.
- Consider typhus when assessing patients presenting with headache, chills, high fever, photophobia, vomiting, rash (generally starting on trunk) who also have a potential exposure to fleas (even if patients deny flea bites).
- A diagnosis of rickettsial diseases is based on two or more of the following: 1) clinical symptoms and an epidemiologic history compatible with a rickettsial disease, 2) the development of specific convalescent-phase antibodies reactive with a given pathogen or antigenic group, 3) a positive polymerase chain reaction (PCR) test result, 4) specific immunohistologic detection of a rickettsial agent, or 5) isolation of a rickettsial agent.
- CDC and DSHS will be assisting with laboratory diagnosis of rickettsial diseases in our area by performing the following tests:
 - **Acute and convalescent serum sample testing (RED TOP TUBE). Acute collected within the first week of illness onset and convalescent 2 to 4 weeks**

- later. A/TCHHSD will be asking for a convalescent specimen, if the physician does not have an opportunity to collect a convalescent specimen.
- PCR and culture attempts on appropriate clinical specimens (EDTA, LAVENDAR TOP TUBE). Collect within the first 5 days of illness onset.
 - Collection of skin biopsy from any rash associated with the illness, for PCR and culture, and could also be provided to the CDC Pathology Department for immunohistochemistry.
 - In addition to specimen submission, the CDC Rickettsial Testing Branch requires a Form B: Rickettsial Disease Information for Diagnostic Specimens and a CDC 50.34. A/TCHHSD can complete or provide these forms to physicians by fax or electronically, call (512) 972-5555.
 - Lab specimens need to go to the DSHS lab. If your practice uses a major lab such as CPL or Lab Corp, please indicate to send specimens to DSHS lab. If your practice collects specimens on site and needs assistance with transport please call the A/TCHHSD at (512) 972-5555.
- Early diagnosis and treatment can reduce the severity of disease. Doxycycline is the treatment of choice for murine typhus in both adults and children. Chloramphenicol is an alternative for small children and pregnant women. Infection and recovery confer lifelong immunity to typhus.

Attached please find a fact sheet on murine typhus for the general public.

Additional information on murine typhus can be found on DSHS web site:

http://www.dshs.state.tx.us/idcu/disease/murine_typhus/information/

We appreciate your assistance in this matter. Additional questions and or concerns can be directed to our Disease Surveillance Program at (512) 972-5555.

Philip Huang, M.D., M.P.H.
Medical Director/Health Authority
Austin Travis County Health and Human Services Department