

Murine Typhus

What is murine typhus?

Murine typhus, also known as endemic typhus, is a flea-borne disease caused by a group of bacteria known as *Rickettsia*. It is **not** spread person to person or via ticks. People can become infected when they come into contact with fleas on rats, rodents, cats, opossums, or other mammals. It is common worldwide, but in the United States occurs primarily in Texas, California, and Hawaii. Animals can be infected and pass the bacteria on to their fleas. Infected animals do not normally show symptoms.

If untreated, patients with murine typhus can require hospitalization, but the case fatality rate is only about 1% in the U.S.



Rats are one of the animals that can carry and spread murine typhus

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms normally begin 6 to 14 days after exposure, and may include: fever, headache, rash, body aches, headaches, vomiting, or chills. The rash normally begins on the trunk and spreads outward to limbs, normally excluding the palms of the hands, soles of the feet, and face. The rash and symptoms can differ between individuals, however.

There are many other diseases with these symptoms; consult your health care provider if you are experiencing any of the above. If you have been exposed to fleas, make sure to inform your provider.



Murine typhus is spread by fleas

How is it treated?

There is no vaccine for preventing murine typhus. It is normally treatable with antibiotics. Early treatment helps reduce the severity of the disease.

What can I do to prevent it?

Take personal precautions

Wear heavy, long-sleeved clothing, and use insect repellent containing DEET when going into possible flea-infested areas. These are normally poorly maintained places with lots of tall grass or overgrown brush. Avoid any interactions with wild or feral animals.

Practice flea control on pets

Consult your veterinarian regarding oral or topical flea medications that can be used on domestic animals.

Clean areas where pets sleep and eat. If you clean flea-infested areas, spray the area with disinfectant first. Use protective equipment such as gloves, goggles, or a particle mask when cleaning. Avoid sweeping, vacuuming, or stirring up dust in the area until it is thoroughly wet with disinfectant or you are wearing protective equipment.

Eliminate flea and animal habitat

Do not feed or encourage wild and/or feral animals to visit your yard and home. Cover trash cans, do not leave pet food outside, and remove fallen fruit, bird seed, or other sources of food. Keep your yard and home free of spaces where rodents and other animals might live, including heavy underbrush, holes, crawl spaces, etc. There are insecticides you can use if the habitat cannot be covered, or is infested with fleas.

Do not attempt to relocate or catch wild or feral animals on your own; contact animal control.

If there are wild or feral animals living in your yard or near your home, it is best to use insecticide treatment first, then relocate or exterminate rodent and mammal populations. If the rodent is killed before fleas are eradicated, the fleas will leave and seek another host, which increases your chance of infection.

Where can I get additional information?

You can visit the Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals website at: www.infectiousdiseases.dhh.louisiana.gov, or call 1-800-256-2748.