

# Flea-borne Typhus

## 1. What is flea-borne typhus (typhus)?

Flea-borne typhus is a disease that fleas can spread to humans. Bacteria (germs) found in infected fleas cause typhus. People get sick with flea-borne typhus when infected flea feces (poop) are rubbed into cuts or scrapes in the skin or rubbed into the eyes. Typhus is not transmitted from person-to-person.

## 2. How does this disease spread?

In LA County, typhus infects the fleas of rats, stray cats, opossums, or other small animals. Typhus spreads when animals carrying infected fleas come into close contact with people. Typhus can spread to other areas when these animals move from place to place.

## 3. What are the symptoms of this disease?

Signs of typhus can start within 2 weeks after contact with the infected flea. Many people have high fever, headache, chills, body aches and pains. A rash can appear on the chest, back, arms, or legs. Most people will recover without treatment, but some cases may be severe. When left untreated, severe illness can cause damage to the liver, kidneys, heart, lungs, and brain. Death may occur in rare cases.

## 4. How is this disease diagnosed and treated?

Typhus is diagnosed with a specific blood test. Call your doctor if you have symptoms. This disease can be treated with certain antibiotics (medicine that kills bacteria).

## 5. Are my pets safe?

Infected fleas can also spread to pet cats and dogs. Pets that are allowed outside are more likely to come in contact with fleas and could bring them inside your home. Infected animals do not usually get sick.

## 6. How can you prevent getting this disease?

- **Keep fleas off you and your pets**
  - Use flea control products on your pets.
  - Keep pets indoors.
  - Use EPA-registered insect repellent labeled for use against fleas.
- **Avoid being near wild or stray animals**
  - Do not leave pet food outdoors.
  - Do not provide food or water for wild animals.
  - Maintain yard free of debris and trim overgrown plants and bushes.
  - Keep garbage containers tightly covered to avoid attracting animals.
  - Close up crawl spaces and openings under home where rats and stray animals can sleep, hide, or find food.
  - Protect yourself by wearing gloves and a mask when cleaning these areas. Wash your hands when you're finished.



## Key Points

- Flea-borne typhus is a disease that fleas can spread to humans. Infected fleas carry bacteria (germs) that cause the disease. It is not spread person-to-person.
- Avoid fleas and use flea control products on your pets and insect repellent (against fleas) on you.
- Never feed or touch wild animals, especially opossums, rats, and stray cats.

## For more information:

Los Angeles County,  
Department of Public  
Health

<http://www.publichealth.lacounty.gov/acd/VectorTyphus.htm>

California Department of  
Public Health

<https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/Typhus.a>

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