

FACT SHEET: PNEUMONIC PLAGUE

Plague is an infectious disease of animals and humans caused by the bacterium *Yersinia pestis*.

Symptoms:

Pneumonic plague occurs when the bacteria infects the lungs. The first signs of illness are fever, headache, weakness, and cough productive of bloody or watery sputum. The pneumonia progresses over 2 to 4 days and may cause septic shock and, without early treatment, death.

Occurrence:

Y. pestis is found in rodents and their fleas in many areas of the world.

Transmission:

Person-to-person transmission of pneumonic plague occurs through respiratory droplets, which can only infect those who have face-to-face contact with the ill patient.

Management:

Early treatment of pneumonic plague is essential. Several antibiotics are effective, including streptomycin, tetracycline, and chloramphenicol.

Any suspected cases should be reported immediately to local public health officials and treatment sought at the local emergency department.

There is no vaccine against the plague.

Preventative measures:

Prophylactic antibiotic treatment for 7 days will protect persons who have had face-to-face contact with infected patients.

Protective eyewear and masks are indicated if potential contact with respiratory droplets could occur.