



Public Health

How to protect yourself and your neighbors from Flea-Borne Typhus

What is Flea-Borne Typhus?

Flea-borne typhus is a disease that infected fleas can spread to humans. Fleas leave feces (poop) on the skin when they bite. Infection occurs when flea feces containing the bacteria are scratched into the bite site or other skin opening, are rubbed on the eyes, or when germs found in the flea feces are inhaled. Flea-Borne Typhus happens in Southern California, Texas and Hawaii.

How is Flea-Borne Typhus Spread?

In Tarrant County, typhus infects the fleas of the rats, opossums and cats. These animals often come into close contact with people. High numbers of these animals are found when human activities provide a food source. Typhus can spread to other areas when these animals and their fleas move from place to place which is why these animal should not be transferred to another area. Relocating opossums violates Texas Fish and Game laws and is considered inhumane.

What are the Symptoms?

Signs of typhus can start six to 14 days after exposure (having contact) to the infected flea. Many people have fever, headache, chills, body aches and pains. A rash can appear on the chest, back, arms or legs. In rare cases, there may be swelling at the lining of the brain (meningitis) and heart valves (endocarditis). Typhus signs look like many other diseases and is diagnosed with a specific blood test. Contact your doctor if you think you have been infected. This disease is treated with appropriate antibiotics.

Four Tips to Keep Safe from Flea-Borne Typhus



1. Eliminate all possible living locations for wild animals, especially rats, opossums and stray or feral cats, near your home.



2. Stop wild animals, especially rats, opossums and stray or feral cats, from finding food or water near your home.



3. Control fleas on your pets, in your yard and home.



4. Protect yourself when cleaning animal resting and bedding areas.

More on Preventative Tips

Eliminate all possible harborage for wild animals, especially rats, opossums and stray or feral cats. Repair your home to stop these wild animals from nesting in crawl spaces, attics or under decks. Clear your yard of heavy bushes to remove places where they may nest or hide. Call your local animal control office before trapping any wild or stray animals. Do not release them in another location, as this can spread disease. Do not kill them as the fleas will look for a new host, including humans.

Use flea control products for your pets, yard and home. If you have a flea problem, use a professional exterminator to control them in the yard or house. When using a flea control product, follow label directions. Be aware that some products made for dogs are harmful to cats. Talk to your veterinarian about what flea control product is best for your pet.

Stop wild animals, especially rats, opossums and stray or feral cats, from finding food and water near your home. Don't leave pet food or water outside or feed wildlife or stray animals. Pick up all fallen fruit from your yard and store your trash in cans with secure lids.

Protect yourself when cleaning animal resting and bedding areas since flea feces can collect in these areas. Always wear protective gear, like gloves, goggles, and a mask, when cleaning these areas, especially if indoors. Spray affected areas with a disinfectant. Remove materials while still damp to prevent dust. Wash your hands when you are finished.

If your doctor has questions about flea-borne typhus, call:

Tarrant County Public Health Epidemiology Department: 817-321-5350

If you have concerns regarding fleas or your pets, call:

Tarrant County Public Health Environmental Health: 817-321-4960

If you think you have an opossum or rodent problem, call:

Your local animal control office

More information at: www.tarrantcountytx.gov/typhus

