

# 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 and their feces (poop), cause typhus. Fleas leave feces on the skin when they bite. The infection happens when the feces are scratched into the bite or other skin opening. It can also spread when we rub our eyes or breathe in the germs from the flea feces. Flea-borne typhus happens in Southern California, Texas, and Hawaii.

## 2. How does this disease spread?

In LA County, typhus infects the fleas of the Norway rat, roof rat, domestic cat, and opossum. These animals may come into close contact with people, especially if they find a source of food. Infected animals don't usually show signs that they're sick. Typhus can spread to other areas when these animals and their fleas move from place to place. That's why you should not move these animals to another area.

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

Signs of typhus can start 6 to 14 days after having 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. In rare cases, there may be swelling at the lining of the brain (meningitis) and heart valves (endocarditis).

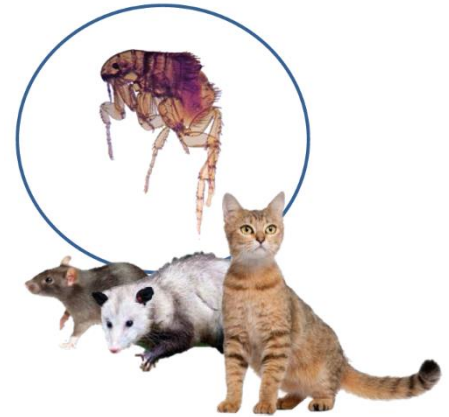
## 4. How is this disease diagnosed and treated?

Typhus is diagnosed with a specific blood test. Call your doctor if you think you've been infected. This disease is treated only with certain antibiotics (medicine that kills bacteria).

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

Typhus can be in areas near humans where there are infected fleas. You can prevent typhus by doing these things:

- **Practice safe flea control**
  - Use flea control products on your pets.
  - When outside, wear pants tucked into socks or boots. Spray insect repellent with DEET on socks and pant cuffs.
- **Avoid being near wild or stray animals**
  - Never feed or touch wild animals, especially opossums, stray, or feral cats.
  - Store your trash in cans with secure lids to avoid attracting animals.
  - Get rid of places where rats and stray animals sleep, hide, or find food, like crawl spaces, attics, or under decks. 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. Bacteria (germs) found in infected fleas and their feces (poop), cause typhus.
- Practice safe flea control, avoid flea bites and use flea control products on your pets.
- Never feed or touch wild animals, especially opossums, rats, and stray or feral 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/HEALTH/INFO/DISCOND/Pages/Typhus.aspx>

CDCP-ACDC-0067-01 (08/24/15)