

## Flea-Borne Typhus

### What is flea-borne typhus?

Flea-borne typhus is a disease caused by *Rickettsia typhi* and possibly *Rickettsia felis* bacteria. Human cases of flea-borne typhus are reported worldwide, but mainly in tropical and coastal areas. In the United States, most cases occur in Texas, California, and Hawaii, with an average of about 300 cases every year. In California, flea-borne typhus is considered endemic (always present) in areas of Los Angeles and Orange counties, but cases sometimes are also reported from other parts of California.

### How do you get flea-borne typhus?

A person can get typhus by coming in contact with infected fleas. The bacteria that causes typhus can be found in the feces of some fleas, and this bacteria can spread to the skin surface when the flea bites. If the person scratches the flea bite area, some of the bacteria in the flea feces can enter the person's blood stream and infect them.

### What animals can carry the bacteria that causes typhus?

In the United States, rats, opossums, and other small mammals can carry the bacteria that causes typhus. Rat fleas (*Xenopsylla cheopis*) and cat fleas (*Ctenocephalides felis*) are most commonly associated with the spread of flea-borne typhus. Fleas may become infected when they bite these animals, and the fleas can then spread the bacteria to humans, dogs, and cats.

### What are the symptoms of flea-borne typhus?

Although most people have mild or no symptoms at all, many people infected with flea-borne typhus may have fever, headache, chills, and muscle aches 6 - 14 days after the flea bite. Some people may also get a rash that may begin on the chest and spread to the sides and back. Most of the reported flea-borne typhus cases in California have required hospital care.

### How is flea-borne typhus diagnosed?

Healthcare providers can diagnose flea-borne typhus by evaluating clinical symptoms and testing a patient's blood.

### How is flea-borne typhus treated?

Flea-borne typhus is treated with antibiotics. Most people recover in a few days. Death from typhus is rare (worldwide, about 2 - 4% without treatment).

### How can you prevent getting flea-borne typhus?

The key to preventing flea-borne typhus is to avoid direct contact with fleas. Use flea control products on pet dogs or cats, and keep cats indoors. Prevent rats, opossums, stray (feral) cats, and other wild animals from visiting or living around your home.

- Do not leave pet food outside
- Keep garbage containers tightly covered
- Trim and remove plants around buildings

**Where can I get more information about flea-borne typhus?**

Visit the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [murine typhus website](https://www.cdc.gov/typhus/murine/index.html) (<https://www.cdc.gov/typhus/murine/index.html>).

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