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CARING FOR NEW MEXICO

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NEW MEXICO DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH  
Secretary Catherine Torres, M.D.

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## **Department of Health Confirms Plague in Dog from Rio Rancho** *Department Offers Advice to Stay Safe from Plague*

(Santa Fe) –The New Mexico Department of Health’s Scientific Laboratory Division confirmed plague this week in a dog that lives in the city of Rio Rancho. The dog was most likely infected when running in open fields on the north end of the city and encountering sick or dead rabbits and other rodents.

“A plague case in a pet serves as a warning that there is plague activity in rabbits, rodents and their fleas in the area,” said Department of Health Cabinet Secretary, Dr. Catherine Torres. “I encourage everyone to follow simple prevention recommendations to keep themselves and their families and pets safe.”

Plague, a bacterial disease of rodents, is generally transmitted to humans through the bites of infected fleas, but can also be transmitted by direct contact with infected animals, including rodents, rabbits, and pets.

“Pets infected with plague are often hunters who have eaten an infected rodent or been bitten by a rodent’s fleas prior to getting ill,” said Dr. Paul Ettestad, public health veterinarian for the Department of Health. “Pets can transport the fleas back into the home where they can infect people.”

Symptoms of plague in humans include sudden onset of fever, chills, headache, and weakness. In most cases there is a painful swelling of the lymph node in the groin, armpit or neck areas. Plague symptoms in cats and dogs are fever, lethargy and loss of appetite. There may be a swelling in the lymph node under the jaw. With prompt diagnosis and appropriate antibiotic treatment, the fatality rate in people and pets can be greatly reduced.

To prevent plague, the Department of Health recommends:

- Avoid sick or dead rodents and rabbits, and their nests and burrows.
- Keep your pets from roaming and hunting and talk to your veterinarian about using an appropriate flea control product.
- Clean up areas near the house where rodents could live, such as woodpiles, brush piles, junk and abandoned vehicles.
- Sick pets should be examined promptly by a veterinarian.
- See your doctor about any unexplained illness involving a sudden and severe fever.
- Put hay, wood, and compost piles as far as possible from your home.
- Don’t leave your pet’s food and water where mice can get to it.



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In New Mexico, there have been two human cases so far in 2011, both from Santa Fe County, no human cases in 2010 and six human cases of plague in 2009: three from Santa Fe County, two from Bernalillo County and one from Sandoval County. One of the Santa Fe County cases was a fatal case in an 8-year-old boy.

For more information, including fact sheets in English and Spanish, go to the Department's website at: <http://www.health.state.nm.us/ERD/HealthData/plague.shtml>.

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