

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

For Immediate Release
May 27, 2011

Media contact: Chris J. Minnick
Cell: 575-649-0754

New Mexico Dept. of Health Reports Second Human Plague Case in New Mexico for 2011
Santa Fe County Man is Hospitalized and Recovering

(Santa Fe) -- The New Mexico Department of Health announced today the second case of bubonic plague in New Mexico this year in a 78-year-old man from Santa Fe County who is hospitalized and recovering. The first case was reported in early May in a 58-year-old man from Santa Fe County who also hospitalized and is recovering at home.

“We are seeing plague activity in both humans and animals from many different locations of north-central New Mexico,” said Department of Health Cabinet Secretary, Dr. Catherine Torres. “Everyone needs to be aware of the situation and take precautions to avoid rodents and their fleas.”

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

“Pets that bring rodents or their fleas back into the home and bedroom has been a risk factor for people getting plague,” said Dr. Paul Ettestad, public health veterinarian for the Department of Health. “Preventing your pets from roaming and hunting rodents, using a flea control product on all your pets, and not allowing them to sleep in bed with you are three things you can do to decrease your risk of being bitten by an infected flea.”

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.

In New Mexico, there were 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 of Health's website at: <http://www.health.state.nm.us/ERD/HealthData/plague.shtml>.

#