

Awareness about 'Plague'

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Eden District Municipal Health Services core functions comprise of nine Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), namely:

• Environmental pollution control

• Waste management

• Water quality monitoring

• Vector control

• Chemical safety

• Surveillance and prevention of communicable diseases

• Disposal of the dead

• Health surveillance of premises; and

• Food control.

Environmental Health Practitioners (EHPs) of Eden's main goal is to ensure an appropriate effective and equitable Municipal Health Services (MHS) for the Eden region. The surveillance and prevention of communicable diseases form part of Eden District Municipality KPIs.

We have decided to create awareness about 'Plague' because of its prevalence in Madagascar which has left more than 140 people dead. Eden DM's EHPs have an integrated governmental task team relationship with respective role players, namely spheres of government, interested and specialist role-players to ensure the sustainability of effective community health services.

What is 'Plague'?

'Plague', also known as Black Death, is a bacterial infection caused by *Yersinia pestis*. It is a disease of wild animals, mainly rodents. 'Plague' is usually spread from animal to animal or from animal to human by fleas; occasionally, human-to-human transmission leads rapidly to outbreaks.

Different types of 'Plague' that affects humans?

- Bubonic Plague: an infection of the lymph glands, can progress to septicaemic or pneumonic forms. Occurs in the area closest to where the bacteria entered the skin, occasionally the swollen lymph nodes may break open;
- Septicaemic Plague: is a life-threatening infection of the blood, more commonly spread by bites from infected fleas;
- Pneumonic Plague: infection of the lungs that may follow Bubonic or Septicaemic 'Plague', or that may be acquired directly by inhaling infectious droplets from a patient with 'Plague' pneumonia.

How does 'Plague' spread?

- The disease is usually spread by fleas from rodents to other animals and humans;

- Direct contact with infected bodily fluids or tissues while touching sick or dead animal;
- Inhaling infectious respiratory droplets during close contact with an infected person or animal.

The symptoms of 'Plague'?

The symptoms of 'Plague' depend on the concentrated areas of infection in each person.Â They include fever, headache, vomiting, shortness of breath, chest pain and coughing. Bubonic 'Plague' in lymph nodes, Septicaemic 'Plague' in blood vessels, and pneumonic 'Plague' in lungs. Symptoms typically start about two to ten days after exposure.

Treatment options for 'Plague'

Plague can be successfully treated with antibiotics if diagnosed and treated promptly.

Prevention and control measures?

- Take necessary precautions against flea bites and do not pick up or touch dead animals;
- Avoid close contact with ill persons;
- Avoid direct contact with infected tissues;
- Implement measures to control rodents;
- Use DEET-containing insect repellent to prevent flea bites;
- Safe management and burial of deceased victims;
- Go to the closest health centre in the event of suspicious symptoms.

Sources of Information: Department of Health and National Institute of Communicable Diseases (NICD).