

New Mexico Teen Contracts Bubonic Plague

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Senior Writer

A case of bubonic plague was confirmed in a teenaged boy in New Mexico this summer, according to the New Mexico Department of Health.

The boy was the first known human case of plague in New Mexico this year; no cases occurred in 2004, and one case occurred in an adult in 2003.

At press time, the teenager was expect-

ed to return home after several days in the hospital. He was treated with gentamicin and should recover fully without complications, according to Paul Ettestad, D.V.M., New Mexico's state public health veterinarian.

Dr. Ettestad and colleagues investigated the area near the boy's semirural home, where they found rodent burrows and the bodies of several rock squirrels who had apparently died of plague.

"Rock squirrels and their fleas are the

number one source of plague in New Mexico," Dr. Ettestad said in an interview.

Although plague is primarily a bacterial disease of rodents, it can jump to humans by way of bites from infected fleas or by direct contact with infected animals, including pets and wildlife.

Symptoms include fever, chills, and painful, swollen lymph nodes in the neck, armpit, or groin. Some patients also have headaches, vomiting, and diarrhea.

The disease can be fatal in both people

and pets if not treated promptly.

The New Mexico Department of Health recommends several precautions to prevent plague, including avoiding sick or dead rodents, teaching children to stay away from rodent nests or burrows, and cleaning areas near the house where rodents could nest. In addition, pets should be treated with flea control products and not allowed to roam or hunt. Sick pets should be taken to a veterinarian as soon as possible. ■

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