



To: Emergency Medical Alert Network (EMAN) Participants

Date: August 18, 2006

Plague-Positive Ground Squirrels in San Diego County

Two ground squirrels from Cedar Grove Campground near the Palomar Observatory have tested positive for plague as part of routine surveillance by the County Vector Surveillance and Control program. Plague in wild animals has been previously documented in rural and mountainous areas of San Diego County; however, this is the first time it has been identified at this campground. Appropriate control measures are being taken at this and neighboring campgrounds to reduce the potential for human exposure.

Plague, which is caused by *Yersinia pestis*, may be transmitted to humans by bites from infected fleas, by handling the carcasses of infected animals, or by scratches or bites from infected domestic cats. Symptoms of plague in humans generally develop 2 to 6 days after infection. Possible symptoms are a sudden onset of high fever, malaise, muscle pain, nausea and vomiting. With bubonic plague, individuals may develop a large, swollen, painful lymph node, called a bubo, in the area of the flea bite, usually in the groin or armpit. All forms of bubonic plague, including those without lymphadenopathy, may progress to septicemic plague disseminating to various parts of the body. Secondary lung involvement may lead to pneumonia, possibly with mediastinitis or pleural effusion. Plague pneumonia may lead to person-to-person [or animal-to-person] transmission of respiratory droplets in primary pneumonic or pharyngeal plague.

To date, there have been no locally acquired human cases of plague reported in San Diego County. However, healthcare providers are encouraged to ask patients about history of visiting, hiking or camping in rural mountain areas and possible exposure to fleas and animal hosts if they present with symptoms compatible with plague. Suspected isolates of *Y. pestis* may be referred to the San Diego County Public Health Laboratory for rapid identification or rule out. Suspected and confirmed cases should be reported to the Community Epidemiology Branch at 619-515-6620.

***Vibrio parahaemolyticus* Associated with Consumption of Raw Oysters**

During the 11-week period between June 1 and August 17, 2006, the Community Epidemiology Branch received twelve (12) reports of *Vibrio parahaemolyticus* among San Diego residents. During the same time period in 2005, no reports were received of *V. parahaemolyticus* infection. Nine (75%) of the recent cases have been associated with consumption of raw oysters in Mexico or the U.S.

Healthcare providers are encouraged to: 1) educate patients about the risks of consuming raw oysters, especially patients with underlying medical conditions such as liver disease, 2) perform stool testing when patients present with symptoms consistent with *V. parahaemolyticus*, and 3) report confirmed cases of *V. parahaemolyticus* (and other reportable enteric illnesses) to the Community Epidemiology Branch.

V. parahaemolyticus naturally inhabits coastal waters and is present in higher concentrations during summer months. *V. parahaemolyticus* should be considered if a patient presents with watery diarrhea and reports eating raw or undercooked seafood, especially oysters, during the 24 hours prior to symptom onset. Although less common, *V. parahaemolyticus* can also cause skin infections when open wounds are exposed to warm seawater. For more information, please visit: http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dbmd/diseaseinfo/vibrioparahaemolyticus_g.htm.

Thank you for your continued participation.

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County of San Diego, Health & Human Services Agency
Community Epidemiology Branch