



Hawaii State Department of Health

Disease Investigation Branch

Oahu 586-4586, Maui 984-8213, Hilo 933-0912,

Kona 322-4877, Kauai 241-3563

Murine typhus

What is Murine typhus?

Murine typhus is a disease carried by rodents (rats, mice, mongoose) and spread by fleas. It is caused by a bacteria-like organism called *Rickettsia typhi*. The fleas can also live on other small mammals, including pets, such as cats and dogs. Once a flea is infected, it can spread the disease for the rest of its life.

How do you get it?

The disease is spread through the bites of infected fleas. Murine typhus is not spread from one person to another, or from person to fleas.

What are the symptoms?

The symptoms come on suddenly and include fever with headaches and body and joint pain. Nausea, vomiting and stomach aches are common in typhus. There may also be an itchy rash on the chest and back. The illness seldom lasts longer than 2 weeks, and is usually much shorter with treatment. Typhus can be severe in pregnancy.

When do symptoms start?

The symptoms usually appear 7 to 14 days after being bitten by an infected flea.

What is the treatment?

A doctor can prescribe medicine to treat typhus. If not treated, typhus can lead to complications such as encephalitis (brain inflammation) or organ failure.

If you get it once, can you get it again?

No. Once you have had murine typhus, you should not get it again.

How can you keep from getting typhus?

Reduce your contact with fleas, rats and mice. To reduce rodent populations near your home, keep your yard and adjacent areas free of food, water and breeding sites. Feed pets single servings of food and water. Treat your house pets regularly for fleas. Use insect repellents containing DEET if you will be exposed to fleas.

What else should I know?

Trapping rodents live is preferable to poisoning the rodents to prevent the fleas from finding new hosts. Use extreme care when using pesticides and rat/mice poisons around children and pets. Note, if poisons containing Warfarin or Coumadin are used, house pets or predatory birds that feed on poisoned rodents may also die.