

First L.A. Human Case Of Bubonic Plague Since '84

(CBS) LOS ANGELES A woman from the Country Club Park area contracted a case of bubonic plague, the first human case in Los Angeles County since 1984, county health officials said Tuesday.

The woman, who has not been identified, came down with symptoms last week and remains hospitalized.

Health officials said they believe the woman was exposed to fleas in the area around her house, although an investigation is continuing.

Public health workers set out traps today to catch squirrels and other wild animals in the area near her home. County Public Health Laboratory workers will test blood from those animals to determine if there has been any exposure to the plague bacteria.

"Bubonic plague is not usually transmissible from person to person," said Dr. Jonathan Fielding, head of public health. "Fortunately, human plague infection is rare in urban environments, and this single case should not be a cause for alarm in the area where this occurred."

Bubonic plague is found in ground squirrels around Tehachapi, Lake Isabella, Frazier Park and in the Angeles National Forest between Los Angeles and the Antelope Valley.

Plague is common among wild animals in certain areas but is seldom spread to humans, according to health officials.

"Plague is characterized by fever, muscle aches, nausea, headache, sore throat, fatigue and swollen, tender lymph nodes associated with the arm or leg that has flea bites and is treatable with antibiotics," said Dr. Roshan Reporter of the Acute Communicable Disease Control Program.

"The disease often causes illness serious enough to warrant hospitalization, but if treated is rarely fatal," Reporters aid.

Residents are urged to trim ivy, ground cover and other heavy vegetation that can harbor rats and provide cover for squirrels.

"Outside openings to attics, crawl spaces and similar locations should be sealed off so rats and squirrels can't get into houses, garages or other structures," said Frank Hall, chief of the Los Angeles County Vector Management Program.

"Pet owners should make an extra effort to keep their domestic animals free of fleas and avoid leaving out pet food where it can attract wild animals," he said.

The Plague Doctor

People in the seventeenth century did not know what caused the plague and many believed it was a punishment from God. They did realise that coming into contact with those infected increased the risk of contracting the disease yourself. Cures and preventative measures were not at all effective

Suggested Preventions and Cures	How they were supposed to work	What they actually did
Carry Flowers or wear a strong perfume	The smells would help to ward away the disease	Nothing
Drink hot drinks	The victim would then sweat out the disease	Nothing
Carry a lucky charm	The charm would ward off the disease	Nothing
Use leeches to bleed the victim	This would remove infected blood	Nothing
Smoke a pipe of tobacco	The smoke would ward off the disease	Nothing
Give a strong dose of laxatives	This would cause the victim to completely empty his bowels, thus removing the disease.	Strong doses of laxatives can cause death from dehydration.
Coat the victims with mercury and place them in the oven.	The combination of mercury and heat from the oven would kill off the disease.	This could actually increase the likelihood of death - mercury is poisonous and the heat from the oven caused serious burns.

Many doctors, knowing that they could do nothing for plague victims, simply didn't bother trying to treat the disease. Those that did made sure that they were as protected as possible from the disease by wearing the 'uniform' shown below

