



PRESS RELEASE



EL DORADO COUNTY Environmental Management Department

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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COUNTY HEALTH OFFICER URGES CALIFORNIANS TO TAKE PRECAUTIONS AGAINST PLAGUE AFTER CHIPMUNK TESTS PRESUMPTIVE POSITIVE

South Lake Tahoe, CA – The El Dorado County Department of Environmental Health was notified by the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) that a chipmunk found last week at the Lake Tahoe Basin United States Forest Service (USFS) Taylor Creek Visitor Center tested presumptive positive for *Yersinia pestis*, the bacteria that causes plague. The Taylor Creek Recreation Area may have an elevated plague risk. Fall visitors to area picnic spots and campgrounds and area residents should take precautions to protect themselves from plague, a disease transmitted by infected fleas, Interim County Public Health Officer Dr. Bob Hartmann advised today.

“Individuals can greatly reduce their risk of becoming infected with plague by taking simple precautions, including avoiding contact with wild rodents and their fleas,” Hartmann said. “Do not feed rodents in picnic or campground areas and never handle sick or dead rodents. Also, leave your pets at home when visiting areas with elevated plague risk.”

Plague is a rare yet highly infectious bacterial disease that is spread by squirrels, chipmunks and other wild rodents and their fleas. People may be exposed to plague through an infected flea bite, handling an infected rodent, or exposure to an infected pet (especially a sick cat).

Early symptoms of plague include high fever, chills, nausea, weakness and swollen lymph nodes in the neck, armpit or groin. Individuals who develop these symptoms within 2 weeks of possible exposure should seek immediate medical attention and inform the physician that they have been in a plague endemic area. Plague is curable in its early stages with prompt diagnosis and proper treatment, but may be fatal if not treated early. If a pet becomes sick after visiting an area, take the pet to a veterinarian and inform the vet that the pet has been in an area where rodents have plague.

The USFS is working with El Dorado County and CDPH to educate the public. State and local health officials regularly monitor plague-prone areas. Additional rodent surveillance will be done in the area this week by CDPH, with assistance from El Dorado County Environmental Management and Vector Control, in order to assess public risk. People should report any sick or dead animals to forest, campground or local health officials. Avoid walking, hiking or camping near rodent burrows. Wear long pants tucked into boot tops to reduce exposure to fleas. Apply insect repellent containing DEET on socks and trouser cuffs. Keep wild rodents out of homes, trailers and outbuildings. For protection of pets, keep pets leashed and away from dead rodents.

To report a sick or dead rodent, contact El Dorado County Vector Control at (530) 573-3197. For more information on plague in California, visit the following website:
<http://www.cdph.ca.gov/healthinfo/discond/Pages/Plague.aspx>