



## Hawaii State Department of Health

### Disease Investigation Branch

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## Flea-borne typhus (Murine typhus)

### What is Flea-borne typhus (Murine typhus)?

Flea-borne typhus is a disease carried by rodents (rats, mice, mongoose) and spread to humans by fleas. It is caused by a bacteria 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 when infected flea feces are rubbed into cuts or scrapes in the skin, including the flea bites. It is also possible to be spread through inhalation of infected, dried flea feces, or exposing mucous membranes to infected flea feces. Flea-borne typhus is not spread from one person to another, or from person to fleas.

### What are the symptoms of Flea-borne typhus (Murine typhus)?

The symptoms come on suddenly and include fever, body ache, joint ache, cough, nausea, vomiting, and/or stomach aches. Some people may develop rash few days after the initial symptoms. The illness seldom lasts longer than 2 weeks, but may last for months with complication if not treated.

### When do symptoms start?

The symptoms usually appear 7 to 14 days after the exposure.

### What is the treatment for Flea-borne typhus (Murine typhus)?

A doctor can prescribe antibiotic medicine to treat typhus. Antibiotics are more effective when given soon after symptoms begin. Laboratory test report

can take several weeks, so your doctor may start antibiotic treatment before your test results become available.

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

No. Once you have had flea-borne typhus, you likely will not get it again.

### How do you keep from getting it?

Reduce your contact with fleas, rats, mice, and mongoose. To reduce rodent populations near your home, remove any brush or trash, and keep the grass mowed. Feed pet single serving of food and water, and do not leave overnight. Treat your house pets regularly for fleas. Use insect repellents if you will be exposed to fleas.

Trapping rodents live is preferable to poisoning the rodents to prevent the fleas from finding new hosts. After the capture, double bag dead rodents and discard in trash bins.

Use extreme care when using pesticides and rat/mice poisons around children and pets. Note, if other animals and birds eat poisons, or eat poisoned rodent, they also may die.

For more information, see the CDC's website at <https://www.cdc.gov/typhus/murine/index.html>

For information on rodent control, please go to <https://health.hawaii.gov/docd/files/2017/03/rodent-control-foldout-brochure.pdf>