

Plague

Agent: *Yersinia pestis* (bacteria)

Mode of Transmission: Transmitted to humans through the bite of infected fleas or through bites or scratches from infected animals (e.g., cats). If the disease attacks the lungs, it may be spread from person to person by respiratory droplets released when coughing.

Signs/Symptoms: Fever, chills, nausea, headache and body aches. Specific types of plague also lead to other symptoms, such as swollen lymph nodes (“buboes”), bloodstream infections, and pneumonia.

Prevention: In areas where plague occurs, travelers should avoid contact with rodents and fleas and avoid handling stray animals. Persons with plague that result in pneumonia should be isolated until 48 hours after antibiotics have been started.

Other Important Information: Fewer than 20 people in the United States are diagnosed with plague every year. *Y. pestis* is considered to be one of the agents that could be used for bioterrorism because the bacteria can be spread from person to person and would cause increased illness and death in the population if it were used as a weapon.

No cases of plague have been reported in Virginia since the nineteenth century.