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—
Wendy G. Macy
GENERAL MANAGER

Date: October 16, 2018

To: All City

From: Joanne O'Brien, R.N., MSD Administrator
Arthur Manoukian, M.D., Chief Physician

Subject: Typhus

An outbreak of endemic – as opposed to epidemic – flea-borne Typhus has been identified in downtown Los Angeles. Endemic refers to a disease that is continuously maintained at a baseline level in a geographic area, whereas epidemic means a widespread occurrence of an infectious disease in a community at a particular time. Typhus has always been endemic to the Los Angeles County area; recently, a slight increase in the number of cases has been reported. The cases identified in L.A. number only 10 but are being described as an “outbreak” due to their geographic concentration.

How Typhus Spreads: Flea-borne Typhus is a disease that fleas can spread to humans. Typhus can infect fleas on rodents and stray animals such as cats and opossums. Bacteria found in infected fleas cause Typhus. People can become ill with flea-borne Typhus when infected flea feces (excrement) is rubbed into cuts or scrapes in the skin (for example, by way of intense scratching) or is rubbed into the eyes by unwashed hands, or when particles from dried feces are inhaled. **Typhus cannot be spread from person to person.**

Symptoms: Signs and symptoms of Typhus usually occur within two weeks after contact with infected fleas and include **high fever, chills, and a rash to the chest, legs, and arms.** Medical professionals in your area (including hospitals and urgent care centers) have been notified by the L.A. County Department of Public Health to utilize a high level of suspicion for someone who presents with the above symptoms.

Treatment: Typhus is easily treated with the administration of antibiotics. There is no available vaccine for the prevention of flea-borne Typhus.

Prevention: The County Department of Public Health is working with the City of Los Angeles to identify and reduce the environmental risk for Typhus exposure. The clusters of cases are primarily occurring within homeless encampments, and the Mayor's Office has already announced a number of measures being taken by the Bureau of Sanitation and Bureau of Street Services for additional clean-up in affected areas. The Personnel Department's Medical Services Division recommends the following for employees, especially those regularly assigned to areas where there is contact with homeless encampments or encounters with stray animals:

- Apply insect repellent labeled for the use against fleas (e.g., containing DEET).
- Cover open areas on the skin with Band-Aid.
- Protect yourself by wearing long pants and long sleeves, and donning gloves, masks, and goggles when cleaning potentially infected areas or handling stray animals.
- Do not feed or touch stray animals (unless your job in Animal Services requires it and you are wearing the aforementioned safety equipment).
- Wash and dry clothes and uniforms in the “hot” cycle to rid them of potentially nesting flea eggs.

Further information is available online at the following sites:

<http://www.publichealth.lacounty.gov/acd/VectorTyphus.htm>

<https://www.cdc.gov/typhus/murine/index.html>