



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Media Contacts:

Dr. Mark DiMenna, City of Albuquerque

Cell: 505-263-3299

Kenny Vigil, NMDOH

Cell: 505-470-2290

July 12, 2016

Two Human Tularemia Cases Confirmed in Bernalillo County
Increased plague and tularemia activity this year are cause for concern

(Albuquerque) –The City of Albuquerque Environmental Health Department, the New Mexico Department of Health and the Bernalillo County Health Protection Section announced today that 2 cases of human tularemia have been confirmed from Bernalillo County, with one of the individuals likely being exposed in the bosque. These are the first two laboratory confirmed human cases in New Mexico in 2016.

The cases include a 74-year-old man and a 71-year-old woman. The woman is currently hospitalized but is improving, while the man has fully recovered.

Health authorities are investigating both cases, with a special emphasis on the case that appears to have resulted from exposure in the bosque. It is believed that the illness was the result of a bite from an infected deer fly in the area.

“Tularemia exposure in the Rio Grande bosque area appears to be a new development for us that we are taking seriously,” said Dr. Mark DiMenna, Deputy Director at the City’s Environmental Health Department. “We have historically warned Bernalillo County residents in the East Mountains and along the northern and eastern reaches of the city limits about tularemia risks, but this may represent a new area to be concerned about.”

While the possibility of tularemia transmission in the bosque is a concern, City health officials urge appropriate precautions rather than avoiding use of the bosque. Avoiding sick or dead rodents and preventing deer fly bites are key measures to reduce risk.

“We would like to ask people who are using the bosque trails to report any dead or dying animals they see to us through 311,” added Dr. DiMenna. “We will submit those animals for testing as we investigate the extent of tularemia in the area.”

In addition to the 2 human tularemia cases, the Environmental Health Department and the Department of Health are also investigating a recent case of tularemia in a dog from eastern Bernalillo County and a cat from the Northeast Heights that was presumed to have been infected with plague.

“Tularemia can cause serious illness in both people and pets. We urge New Mexicans to follow the same precautions they would to avoid contracting plague, which includes not handling sick or dead animals,” said Department of Health Secretary Lynn Gallagher. “People can get tularemia if they handle infected animals such as rabbits or rodents or if they are bitten by infected ticks or deer flies.”

Tularemia is caused by bacteria found in rodents and rabbits. Tularemia is often spread by deer fly or tick bites, by direct contact with infected animals, or occasionally through contact with infected soil or water or by inhaling the bacteria. Plague is also a bacterial infection commonly found in rodents, but is most often transmitted by flea bites. Plague and tularemia can be fatal if not treated properly.

Symptoms of tularemia in people usually develop 3 to 5 days after exposure but onset can vary from 1 to 14 days. Plague symptoms in humans typically appear 1-8 days after exposure. Tularemia and plague symptoms are often similar and may include sudden fever, chills, headaches, diarrhea, muscles aches and joint pain. Other symptoms may include swollen and painful lymph glands or difficulty breathing, and in tularemia can also include ulcers on the skin or mouth, swollen and painful eyes, and a sore throat.

To avoid exposure to tularemia:

- Wear gloves and shoes while gardening or landscaping, and wash your hands after these activities.
- Avoid mowing over dead animals when cutting the grass, etc. as this can potentially aerosolize the bacteria.
- Do not drink unpurified water from streams or lakes or allow your pets to drink surface waters.

To avoid exposure to tularemia and plague:

- Avoid contact with wildlife, alive or dead. Dispose of animal carcasses by using a long-handled shovel and either bury them 2-3 feet deep (if allowed) or double bag them in garbage bags and throw them in the trash. **Sick or dead animals in Albuquerque from the bosque or from east of Tramway can be reported to 311.**
- Wear an insect repellent with ingredients demonstrated to be effective, which may include: DEET, picaridin, oil of lemon eucalyptus, or IR3535.
- Ensure that year-round flea and tick control is applied to pets
- Prevent pets from hunting or eating wild animals. Contact a veterinarian if your pet becomes ill with a high fever and/or swollen lymph nodes.

In 2014 there were 5 human cases of tularemia in New Mexico, and in 2015 there were 6 human cases.

In 2015 there were 20 animal and 4 human plague cases in New Mexico, and in 2016 there have been 17 animal plague cases to date.

For more information on rodent-borne disease prevention programs in Albuquerque and Bernalillo County go online to <https://www.cabq.gov/environmentalhealth/urban-biology>

For more information on tularemia go online to <http://www.cdc.gov/tularemia/>

For more information on plague go online to <https://nmhealth.org/about/erd/ideb/zdp/plg/> or <https://www.cdc.gov/plague/>

#