

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Pneumonic Plague Confirmed in Alaska

Cases of pneumonic plague have been confirmed in three Alaska communities. At the same time, at least a dozen communities around Alaska are reporting clusters of patients coming to their hospitals and clinics with flu-like symptoms that are consistent with pneumonic plague.

While this is alarming news, administering antibiotics to those who have been exposed can help protect them from developing the disease.

"Recognizing the symptoms and getting antibiotics in a timely manner is the best course of action in this situation," said Alaska's Chief Medical Officer Lily Lou. "We're monitoring the situation and working with our local and federal partners to get enough medication to provide protection for all of those affected. If you are experiencing symptoms or think you may have been exposed to someone who is sick, contact your medical provider."

This disease is considered highly contagious and can be transmitted by means of respiratory droplets most likely shared by coughing or sneezing, and from touching surfaces which have come in contact with infected individuals. Infected individuals may experience flu-like symptoms including fever, coughing, headaches, weakness, body aches, shortness of breath, chest pain, and bloody or watery saliva. If you are experiencing any of these symptoms, it is important that you get medical care immediately. Call your medical provider for guidance.

Because cases of pneumonic plague have been confirmed in three communities, the State Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS) has requested prophylactic antibiotics to prevent further spread of the disease from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) Strategic National Stockpile.

DHSS has activated its emergency operations center and is coordinating with communities across the state to determine existing quantities of antibiotics in those areas. It takes 12 hours or less for the drugs to be shipped from the Lower 48 to Anchorage. Medical countermeasures (antibiotics) will be repackaged and shipped to affected communities.

Do not go to a Point of Dispensing (POD) if you are experiencing symptoms. Call a provider. The antibiotics that will be given out at the PODs will be doxycycline and ciprofloxacin.

The city of Nome will have a Point of Dispensing site on Friday, April 12 at the Nome Rec Center from 12-2 p.m. Only one member from each household in the city is requested to report to the POD to acquire the needed antibiotics for their family.

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