

STATE OF COLORADO

Bill Owens, Governor
Jane E. Norton, Executive Director

Dedicated to protecting and improving the health and environment of the people of Colorado

4300 Cherry Creek Dr. S.
Denver, Colorado 80246-1530
Phone (303) 692-2000
TDD Line (303) 691-7700
Located in Glendale, Colorado

Laboratory and Radiation Services Division
8100 Lowry Blvd.
Denver, Colorado 80230-6928
(303) 692-3090

<http://www.cdphe.state.co.us>



Colorado Department
of Public Health
and Environment

MEMORANDUM

To: Files
From: Aaron Kipp, Student Intern
John Pape, Epidemiologist, Communicable Disease Epidemiology Program
Date: October 3, 2001
RE: 2000 Plague Summary

Since the last plague epizootic in Colorado ended in 1994, plague activity has been low and limited to small, isolated regional outbreaks. Plague positive animal specimens (n=68) were reported from eighteen counties. Although plague activity was extremely limited in 2000, one human plague case reported in Colorado. A total of six cases were reported nationally.

Of the 68 specimens testing positive for plague, 7 (10%) were rodents and rabbits, 29 (43%) were flea pools, 5 (7%) were cats and 27 (40%) were other animals (21 coyotes, 3 lynx and 3 dogs). Montrose County accounted for 44% of positive specimens (24 flea pools, 3 dogs, 2 prairie dogs and 1 cat tested positive) as the result of the human case investigation. Coyote serology, from a cooperative surveillance project with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, accounted for an 31% of the positives and annual, active surveillance at the Rocky Mountain Arsenal, Adams County, for 9% (3 prairie dogs and 3 flea pools). The remaining positive specimens were either cats or single rodent or flea pools from counties from around the state.

The lone human case occurred in a seven year-old Montrose girl. On May 28, she developed pain in her right groin and presented two days later at a local hospital ER with fever, pain and right inguinal lymphadenopathy. The lymph node was excised on May 31 and *Y. pestis* recovered from cultures of the lymph node tissue. The patient was treated and made an uneventful recovery. The family reported a prairie dog die-off had been observed near the residence where the family dogs commonly roamed. During the investigation these dogs were observed digging in the burrows and chewing on prairie dog carcasses. The two dogs, a prairie dog carcass and numerous flea pools from the area were positive for plague. The patient was probably exposed to prairie dog fleas brought home by the family dogs or from flea bites sustained while playing around the colony.