

HUMAN HEALTH RISKS:

Below are the potential health risks inherent in handling prairie dogs including specific diseases and the symptoms.

A. General Preventive Measures:

1. Minimize direct handling.
2. Wear protective clothing including long pants, long sleeve shirts, closed toe shoes and gloves.
3. Use an insect repellent effective for fleas.
4. Ensure that all prairie dogs are dusted with insecticide.
5. Notify a physician if bitten by a flea or a prairie dog or at the onset of a fever and/or flu-like symptoms within 14 days of the relocation activity or their last contact with prairie dogs, or with any other concerns.
6. Sick, lethargic, or dead (cause unknown) prairie dogs should not be handled.

B. Specific Diseases: It may be appropriate to contact your personal physician, or the state or local health department, for more information on these diseases. The following list of diseases is by no means all-inclusive.

1. Plague: risk from flea bites and from direct contact with blood or tissues
Yersinia pestis, the causative agent of the disease plague, is principally a flea-transmitted bacterial disease of rodents. Humans and other animals become infected with the organism following the bite(s) of one or more infected fleas, or via direct contact with the tissues of body fluids of infected animals. Clinical signs of plague can be non-specific and can occur after a 2-6 day incubation period. Clinical signs include fever, chills, generalized pain, diarrhea, shock and prostration. The bubonic form of plague is manifested by painful swelling under the arms and groin. The septicemic form is manifested by central nervous system signs, bloody urine and saliva, and red splotching of the skin. The pulmonary form is manifested by coughing, bloody sputum and respiratory difficulty. It can arise from the previously mentioned two forms.
2. Tularemia: transmitted through arthropod bites or direct contact with blood or tissues
Francisella tularensis bacterium causes tularemia. Human infections result from the bite of arthropod vectors which are either infected or have contaminated mouthparts (ticks, deerflies, and occasionally other blood-sucking arthropods including mosquitoes, or by ingestion or inhalation of soil or water contaminated by urine or feces or carcasses of infected animals. Tularemia in humans is usually marked by sudden onset (1-10 days, average 3 days after exposure) with high fever, shaking chills, weakness and/or fatigue. Often slow healing ulcers (sores) form at the site of the arthropod bite or where the organism penetrated the skin.
3. Tetanus: risk if bitten by prairie dog; current tetanus shots recommended (within the past 10 years).
Clostridium tetani bacterium causes the disease tetanus, (commonly called lockjaw). It affects the nervous system and is contracted through a deep cut or wound that becomes contaminated with tetanus bacteria. Infection with tetanus bacteria causes severe muscle spasms, including "locking" of the jaw so the patient cannot open their mouth or swallow, and may even lead to death by suffocation. Tetanus is not transmitted from person to person. Common first signs of tetanus are a headache and muscular stiffness in the jaw and neck, difficulty in swallowing, rigidity of abdominal muscles, spasms, sweating and fever. Symptoms usually begin 8 days after the infection, but may range in onset from 3 days to 3 weeks. Consult your medical doctor about vaccination protection against tetanus which can be prevented with a safe and effective vaccine.
4. Bite wounds: risk if bitten by prairie dog; can lead to serious infections if not treated.
Bite wounds may be infected with a number of harmful bacteria. Bite wounds should be examined/treated by a medical professional immediately.