



PUBLIC HEALTH FACT SHEET

**Boston Public Health Commission
Communicable Disease Control Division
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Rickettsialpox

What is Rickettsialpox?

Rickettsialpox is a mild disease carried by mites and caused by the bacterial organism *Rickettsia akari*. This is a primarily urban disease first discovered in New York City in 1946.

Who is at risk for getting Rickettsialpox?

Anyone bitten by infected mites can get rickettsialpox. Most exposures to rodents occur in the home or workplace.

How is rickettsialpox spread?

Rickettsialpox is spread by the bite of a mite that feeds on house mice or other rodents. Infected mites transmit the infection to humans through a bite. Often people do not notice the mite or do not remember being bitten by an insect. Rickettsialpox is most common where there are rodent infestations. The mites generally only tend to feed on people when rodent infestations are severe or rodent control is being done.

What are the symptoms of rickettsialpox?

People infected with *Rickettsia akari* may develop a painless, dry thickened scab with a black center, which is the site of the mite bite. Some people may experience fever, muscle pains, chills, sweating, headache, swollen lymph glands and a generalized rash that may last for several days to a week. The disease is usually self-limited.

How is rickettsialpox diagnosed?

Your healthcare provider may send an antibody test or a biopsy of the infected skin to a specialized laboratory. The laboratory will then determine if the sample contains rickettsialpox.

What is the treatment for rickettsialpox?

Antibiotics such as tetracycline or doxycycline are effective and may be used in treating the disease.

How can rickettsialpox be prevented?

Rodent control is the most effective way of preventing rickettsialpox. Reducing rodent infestations, removing and securing trash around homes and workplaces also helps to prevent rickettsialpox. Mite control and extermination may also be necessary.

**For more information, please contact
Boston Public Health Commission
Communicable Disease Control
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