

Yosemite campground shutting after two squirrels die of plague

August 14 2015

Officials at Yosemite National Park said Friday they will temporarily close a popular campsite after two squirrels died of plague in the area.

Tuolumne Meadows Campground will close from noon Monday through noon Friday so authorities can treat the area with a flea-killing insecticide. Campers had their reservations canceled at the 304-site campground so the insecticide can be sprayed into rodent "burrow holes," the California Department of Health said Friday.

Plague is carried by rodents and is spread by fleas, but transmission between people is rare.

"Although this is a rare disease, and the current risk to humans is low, eliminating the fleas is the best way to protect the public from the disease," said Dr. Karen Smith, director of the state Health Department. "By eliminating the fleas, we reduce the risk of human exposure and break the cycle of [plague](#) in rodents at the sites."

An unidentified child fell ill with the plague after camping with his family at Yosemite's Crane Flat Campground in mid-July. The park reopened Crane Flat on Friday after treating that campground for four days with an [insecticide](#).

The child has been recovering in a hospital. No other family members became sick.

Plague's symptoms can include fever, chills, weakness, abdominal pain, and sometimes shortness of breath and swollen lymph nodes. It can be treated and cured when antibiotics are given soon after infection, but it's deadly when treatment is delayed.

The last three cases of human plague in the state occurred in 2005 and 2006, the Health Department said. All three of those patients survived.

Since 1970, 42 people in California have contracted plague, resulting in nine deaths. Health officials find plague-infected animals every year, mostly in the state's mountains and foothill regions.

Last year, plague was found in the counties of El Dorado, Mariposa, Modoc, Plumas, San Diego, Santa Barbara, and Sierra.

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