



**HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES DEPARTMENT**

*Public Health*

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## Know Before You Go

*Inyo County Health and Human Services staff*

Inyo County has thousands of miles of open space for locals and visitors to enjoy. Whether you are hiking, biking, climbing, swimming, camping, fishing, or participating in one of the many other wonderful outdoor activities, be aware of these and other hazards, and ways you can protect yourself and your loved ones:

**Hantavirus:** Although Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome cases are relatively rare, it is not unusual to see a few cases each year in the Eastern Sierra. Take precautions when entering cabins, trailers and other buildings that may be infested with rodents. The California Department of Public Health recommends the following precautions:

- Avoid contact with all wild rodents, their droppings, and nesting materials.
- Before entering an enclosed area that may be infested with rodents, allow it to air out for at least 30 minutes.
- Do not dry sweep or vacuum areas that rodents have potentially contaminated.
- Surfaces that rodents may have contaminated with urine or droppings should be made wet with a 10% bleach solution or a commercial disinfectant following label directions before mopping up.
- Promptly dispose of all cleaning materials when done, and thoroughly wash hands and clothes.
- Examine the outside of all buildings and seal any holes or other areas that would let rodents get inside.
- Store all food items securely in rodent-proof containers.

The following links provide more information on Hantavirus prevention:

[CDPH- Hantavirus Information](#)

[CDC- Hantavirus Prevention in the Home](#)

**Plague:** Plague is rare among humans but is found each year among squirrels, chipmunks, and other rodents in California and the southwestern U.S.

Plague-infected animals are most likely to be found in the foothills and mountains.

Steps the public can take include:

- Never feed squirrels, chipmunks or other rodents and never touch sick or dead rodents.
- Avoid walking, hiking or camping near rodent burrows.
- Wear long pants tucked into socks or boots to reduce exposure to fleas.
- Spray insect repellent containing DEET on socks and pant cuffs to reduce exposure to fleas.
- Keep wild rodents out of homes, trailers, and outbuildings and away from pets.

The following link provides more information on Plague prevention:

[CDPH- Plague](#)

**Primary Amebic Meningoencephalitis/*Naegleria fowleri*** : According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), *Naegleria fowleri* (commonly referred to as the “brain-eating amoeba” or “brain-eating ameba”), is a free-living microscopic ameba. It can cause a rare and devastating infection of the brain called primary amebic meningoencephalitis (PAM). The ameba is commonly found in warm freshwater (e.g. lakes, rivers, and hot springs) and soil. *Naegleria fowleri* usually infects people when contaminated water enters the body through the nose. Once the ameba enters the nose, it travels to the brain where it causes PAM, which is usually fatal. Infection typically occurs when people go swimming or diving in warm freshwater places, like lakes and rivers. In very rare instances, *Naegleria* infections may also occur when contaminated water from other sources (such as inadequately chlorinated swimming pool water or heated and contaminated tap water) enters the nose. You **cannot** get infected from **swallowing** water contaminated with *Naegleria*.

The only certain way to prevent a *Naegleria fowleri* infection due to swimming is to refrain from water-related activities in warm freshwater. Personal actions to reduce the risk of *Naegleria fowleri* infection should focus on limiting the amount of water going up the nose. These actions could include:

- Hold your nose shut, use nose clips, or keep your head above water when taking part in water-related activities in bodies of warm freshwater.
- Avoid putting your head under the water in hot springs and other untreated thermal waters.

- Avoid water-related activities in warm freshwater during periods of high water temperature.
- Avoid digging in, or stirring up, the sediment while taking part in water-related activities in shallow, warm freshwater areas.

These recommendations make common sense but are not based on any scientific testing since the low numbers of infections make it difficult to ever show that they are effective.

The following links provide more information on PAM and *Nagleria fowleri* exposure prevention:

[CDC- \*Nagleria fowleri\* and Primary Amebic Meningoencephalitis \(PAM\) Information](#)  
[CDC- \*Nagleria fowleri\* swimming precautions](#)

**Tick-Borne Relapsing Fever:** TBRF occurs in the western United States and is usually linked to sleeping in rustic, rodent-infested cabins in the mountains. Although TBRF cases are relatively rare, it is not unusual to see a few cases each year in the Eastern Sierra. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommend the following precautions:

- Avoid sleeping in rodent-infested buildings whenever possible. Although rodent nests may not be visible, other evidence of rodent activity (e.g., droppings) are a sign that a building may be infested.
- Prevent tick bites. Use insect repellent containing DEET (on skin or clothing) or permethrin (applied to clothing or equipment).
- If you are renting a cabin and notice a rodent infestation, contact the owner to alert them.
- If you own a cabin, consult a licensed pest control professional who can safely:
  - Identify and remove any rodent nests from walls, attics, crawl spaces, and floors. (Other diseases can be transmitted by rodent droppings—leave this job to a professional!)
  - Treat “cracks and crevices” in the walls with pesticide.
  - Establish a pest control plan to keep rodents out.

The following links provide more information on TBRF prevention:

[CDC- TBRF Information](#)  
[CDPH- TBRF Information](#)

**West Nile Virus (WNV):** Human cases of West Nile Virus are occasionally reported in Inyo County, most often during the summer months when mosquito activity is high. Please take the following precautions:

- Avoid Mosquito Bites by wearing an EPA-approved mosquito repellent; wearing long-sleeve shirts and pants; avoiding outdoor activities when mosquitos are most active (dawn/dusk).
- Control mosquitos indoors and outdoors using air conditioning, if available; install screens and maintain them to insure there are no holes; empty and scrub, turn over, cover, or throw out items that hold water, such as tires, buckets, planters, toys, pools, birdbaths, flowerpots, or trash containers.

The following links provide more information on WNV prevention:

[CA West Nile Virus Information](#)

[CDC West Nile Virus Prevention](#)

[Owens Valley Mosquito Abatement Program](#)