

# Environmental Health Response to a Prairie Dog Die-off Commerce City 2019

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# What is Plague?

- Bacterial disease caused by, *Yersinia pestis*
- Occurs throughout the western U.S.
- People can get the plague from:
  - bites of infected fleas
  - touching or skinning infected animals
  - inhaling respiratory droplets from a person or animal (especially cats) infected with pneumonic plague
- Treatable with antibiotics





# TCHD Notification









- Notified on July 31<sup>st</sup>
  - Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge reported a prairie dog positive for *Yersinia pestis*
  - Commerce City employees observed a lack of prairie dogs activity (Prairie Gateway Open Space and at Dicks Sporting Goods Park)



# Map of Area



Observation map provided by Commerce City on 7/31

-  Live Prairie Dog Activity
-  Live Prairie Dog Activity
-  Potential Prairie Dog Die off
-  Potential Prairie Dog Management
-  Area Not Surveyed
-  Plague Outbreak Confirmed
-  Current Fireworks Shoot Site
-  Prairie Dog Die Off



# Site Assessment

- August 1<sup>st</sup>
  - Dicks Sporting Goods Park
    - Little to no prairie dog activity
    - Fleas were collected from the parking lots and submitted for testing
  - Commerce City Properties
    - Little to no prairie dog activity
    - Fleas were collected and submitted for testing
    - Fireworks site had fresh prairie dog carcasses



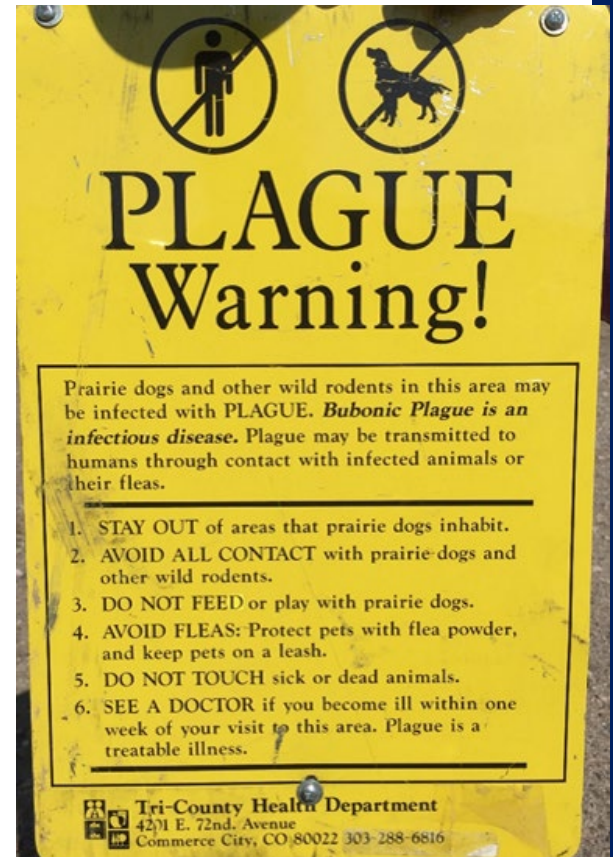
# Surrounding Properties

- Monitoring prairie dog colonies adjacent to the affected area.
- Unlikely this will spread to neighboring properties.
- Residents need to keep pets restrained from roaming free.



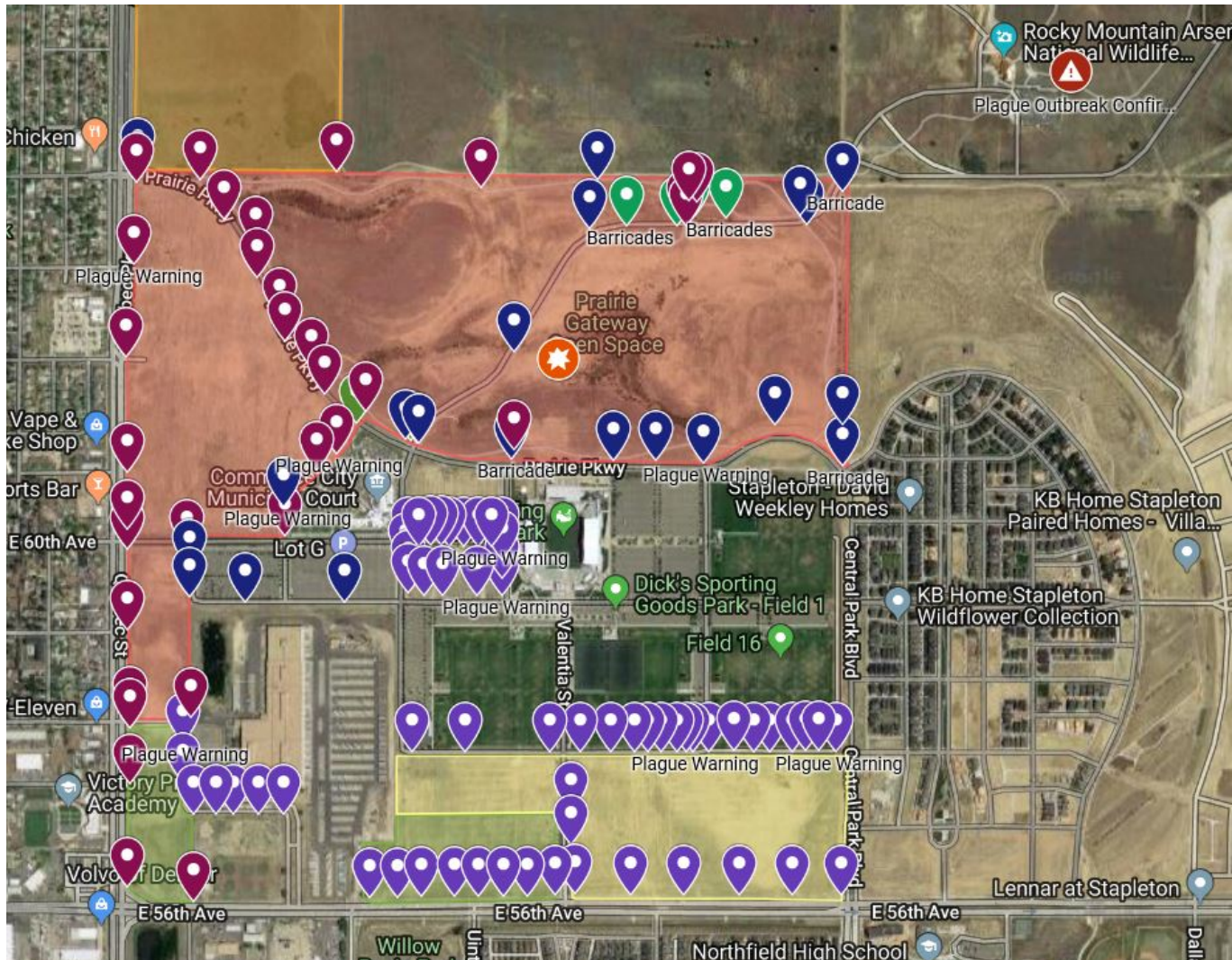
# TCHD Response

- August 1<sup>st</sup> – 2<sup>nd</sup>
  - Limit public access into affected areas
  - Recommendations:
    - Closure of trails
    - Restrict cars to asphalt parking only
    - Closure of the field site for fireworks
- Plague Warning Signs Posted
- Insecticide applied to DSGP area and Commerce City properties
- Tri-County press release distributed with coordination from partners (DSGP, RMANWR, Commerce City)





# Locations of Signs Posted





# TCHD Response Cont.

- August 6<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup>
  - Completed insecticide application at DSGP and Commerce City properties
  - Reassessed area and checked for fleas in the dirt parking lots of DSGP and the fireworks site





# TCHD Response Cont.

- August 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup>
  - DSGP dirt lots and the fireworks site were all reassessed, fleas were collected and submitted for testing
  - All burrows with fleas were re-treated with insecticide
  - Second Tri-County press release distributed with updated information from partners (DSGP, RMANWR, Commerce City, Denver)
- August 14<sup>th</sup>
  - Reassessed area fleas collected and submitted for testing
  - All burrows with fleas were retreated with insecticide





# Summary of Actions Completed

- Warning signs were posted
- All burrows on dirt lots at DSGP property were treated with insecticide
- The Prairie Gateway Open Space at the firework site, along sides of trails, and on the east side of Quebec Street were treated with insecticide
- Collected flea samples and preparing them for lab testing



# Continuing Actions

- Continue to check burrows for fleas
- Fleas collected will be tested for plague
- Burrows with fleas will be re-treated and checked weekly
- Affected areas will be closed with signage until areas are cleared





# Continuing Actions

- TCHD will continue to monitor areas around the refuge for additional die-off activity
- Updates will be shared with public on a weekly basis regarding status of the area
- No evidence of human illness at this point



**For Immediate Release: August 9, 2019**

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Dick's Sporting Goods Park, 303-727-3500  
David Lucas, Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge, 303-289-0232  
Jodi Hardee, Commerce City Community Relations Manager, 303-286-4868  
Cindy Karvasi, Denver Parks and Recreation, 720-913-0620

## **Restrictions on Plague-Affected Prairie Dog Areas Remain in Effect**

### ***First Creek at DEN Open Space Added to Existing Closures and Restrictions***

Numerous sites with plague-infected fleas affecting local prairie dog colonies remain closed so authorities can continue to treat the prairie dogs' holes with insecticide to kill fleas that transmit the disease to prairie dogs, people, and pets. Access to the following areas is not permitted until further notice:

**First Creek at DEN Open Space** was closed on August 8. The area is located between the Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge and Pena Boulevard, north of 56<sup>th</sup> Avenue on Buckley Road.

**The Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge** remains closed to public visitation as staff continue to assess the scope of impacted areas and implement the refuge's prairie dog management plan: [www.fws.gov/refuge/rocky\\_mountain\\_arsenal](http://www.fws.gov/refuge/rocky_mountain_arsenal)

In **Commerce City**, the **Prairie Gateway Open Space** remains closed along with the vacant fields along East 56<sup>th</sup> Avenue near the intersections with Quebec Street and Valentia Street. Updates from Commerce City are available at [www.c3gov.com](http://www.c3gov.com)

**Dick's Sporting Goods Park** is open, but is restricting cars to asphalt parking areas. Updates are available at [www.dicksportingoodspark.com](http://www.dicksportingoodspark.com)

"Prairie dog die-offs due to plague comes in cycles in Colorado and can place people and pets at risk of exposure. Affected prairie dog holes can be safely treated with insecticide to kill the fleas that spread the disease," states John M. Douglas, Jr., MD, Executive Director of Tri-County Health Department. "The prairie dog colonies are being monitored and treated, but there is still evidence of active disease in these areas requiring them to remain closed to people and pets."

Plague infection in people is uncommon and there have not been any reported cases. Be aware of the common symptoms of plague, which include fever, swollen and tender lymph nodes, chills, and extreme exhaustion. Anyone experiencing these symptoms should promptly contact their health care provider. Although plague can cause serious illness, it can be effectively treated with antibiotics, especially when diagnosed early. Dogs that are exposed to plague do not usually get sick, but can transport infected fleas and expose people.

Tri-County Health Department will continue to monitor these plague-impacted areas and provide weekly updates on Fridays. Check individual agency websites for information, and visit [www.tchd.org/271/Animal-Related-Zoonotic-Diseases](http://www.tchd.org/271/Animal-Related-Zoonotic-Diseases) for more information about plague.

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# Questions?