

Memo

TO: Gerard Goedhart, District Manager
FROM: Robert Cummings, Scientific Technical Services Director
DATE: December 31, 2009
RE: Scientific Technical Services Section, 12/25 – 12/31

Murine Typhus Surveillance

The Orange County Health Care Agency reported last week one confirmed case and three suspected cases of flea-borne typhus in a family residing in Santa Ana. District personnel are investigating these cases. So far, only one opossum has been trapped around the victims' house. Blood and fleas collected from the opossum and any other animals trapped at the site will be tested at Western University in Pomona.

Flea-borne typhus is a bacterial disease transmitted by infected fleas. In southern California, cat fleas are often found infected with typhus bacteria (*Rickettsia felis* and/or *Rickettsia typhi*) and transmit the disease among domesticated animals (cats and dogs) and wild animals (primarily opossums and raccoons) living in residential neighborhoods when the fleas jump from animal to animal. People most likely get the disease from infected fleas living on their pets. Hence, flea control of pets is the best preventative strategy in reducing the risk of typhus transmission to humans.