

# Colorado girl, 7, leaves hospital after recovering from "black death" bubonic plague



Seven-year-old Sierra Jane Downing from Pagosa Springs, Colo., smiles during a news conference about her recovery from bubonic plague at the Rocky Mountain Hospital for Children at Presbyterian/St. Luke's Sept. 5, 2012, in Denver. / AP PHOTO/JACK DEMPSEY

(CBS/AP) DENVER - A 7-year-old girl who reportedly was infected with the bubonic plague after burying a dead squirrel is now well enough to go home.

Sierra Jane Downing of Pagosa Springs, Colo. left the Denver hospital Monday afternoon.

Her father had taken her to an emergency room in Pagosa Springs late Aug. 24 after she had a seizure and 107-degree fever. Sierra Jane eventually was flown to Rocky Mountain Hospital for Children in Denver, where doctors diagnosed her with bubonic plague.

Sierra Jane started to recover after being treated with antibiotics.

"I really am excited to see my sissies again," the girl said at the press conference according to [CBS station KCNC-TV in Denver](#).

She also added that she couldn't wait to eat the chicken nuggets at school.

People typically contract the bubonic plague from bites from infected fleas, but can also get it by direct contact with infected animals including rodents, rabbits and pets. A Johnson & Johnson antibiotic was approved by the FDA in April 2012 to combat the disease. In laboratory tests, 94 percent of the monkeys given the medicine were cured of the plague and survived.

Darcy Downing said her daughter may have been infected by insects near a dead squirrel that Sierra Jane wanted to bury while the family was camping in southwest Colorado. Her mother told reporters that she was "so thankful" that her daughter survived.

"I never go near a dead squirrel," Sierra Jane said.

Bubonic plague symptoms in humans include fever, chills, headaches, vomiting, diarrhea and swollen lymph nodes in the groin, armpit or neck areas.

Sierra Jane's was the first human case of the disease confirmed in Colorado since 2006 when four cases were reported, according to state health officials. But, she isn't the first case of the disease this year. A man in Oregon was diagnosed with the plague in June after a cat bit him while he was trying to take a rat out of its mouth. On average, seven cases are reported in the U.S. each year, federal officials said.