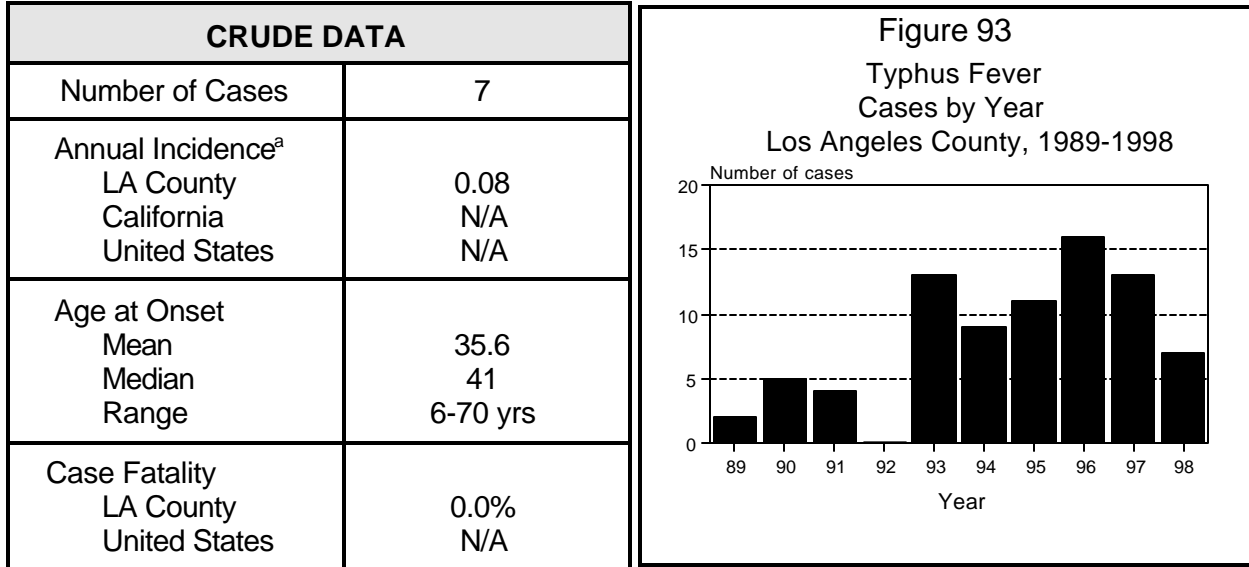


TYPHUS FEVER



^aCases per 100,000 population.

ETIOLOGY

Typhus fever (murine typhus, endemic typhus) is caused by a bacteria, *Rickettsia typhi*.

DISEASE ABSTRACT

Typhus fever reports have increased since 1993 (Figure 93), following a fatal case that year which may have led to increased awareness of the disease. In 1998, seven cases of typhus fever were reported. Symptoms include high fever, severe headache, myalgias, and sometimes a fine maculopapular rash. Occasionally, other complications may occur. Fatalities are uncommon, occurring in less than one percent of cases. Cases occur throughout the year, but more often in summer and fall.

Typhus fever is endemic in the foothills of central LAC. In 1998, three cases (43%) occurred in Central Health District, with one each in Foothill, Hollywood-Wilshire, Northeast and San Antonio Health Districts. Six (86%) of reported cases were hospitalized for an average of 5.7 days.

TRANSMISSION

Human infection most commonly occurs by introduction of infectious flea fecal matter into the bite site or adjacent areas which have been abraded by scratching. Typhus fever cannot be transmitted from person to person. Six of the 1998 cases recalled flea bites or contact with animals (dogs, cats, opossums and rats) that carry fleas.

COMMENTS

Each case of murine typhus is carefully interviewed regarding potential exposures. If possible, field studies of the property where exposure occurred and surrounding areas in the neighborhood are conducted. Local residents are contacted and provided with education about typhus and prevention of the disease by controlling fleas and eliminating harborage for typhus infected animals that carry fleas.

The nonspecific clinical presentation and the lack of a definitive test during the acute phase of the illness make the early diagnosis of murine typhus difficult. Thus, diagnosis of murine typhus depends on the clinical acumen of the treating physician, and is often confirmed after the patient has recovered. Accurate reporting of typhus or suspect typhus cases is important to identify endemic areas in LAC which can be monitored for the presence of disease in the animal populations and to institute control measures. Treatment with antibiotics hastens recovery and lessens the chance of complications.