

**MOTION BY SUPERVISOR HOLLY J. MITCHELL**

April 14, 2026

**Strengthening Prevention and Response Efforts to Flea-Borne Typhus in Los Angeles County**

Over the past 25 years, flea-borne typhus (FBT), a potentially life-threatening disease caused by *Rickettsia typhi*, has re-emerged across the United States. This trend is especially noticeable in Los Angeles County (County), where cases have steadily increased, reaching 187 cases in 2024 and rising further to 220 cases in 2025, the highest number ever recorded. As of March 20, 2026, there have been 17 cases reported for the year. Nearly 9 out of 10 individuals infected with FBT require hospitalization. Cases are especially high in the unincorporated community of Willowbrook, the Los Angeles neighborhood of Westlake, and the city of Santa Monica. Individuals experiencing homelessness face significantly higher risk factors for infection.

FBT typically begins with flu-like symptoms and is transmitted through contact with infected fleas. Infection occurs when flea feces enter the body through cuts, abrasions, or mucous membranes, such as the eyes. While most cases are mild, severe illness requiring hospitalization and, in rare cases, death, can occur. FBT is treatable with antibiotics and is not transmitted from person to person. Cases occur throughout the year but tend to peak in the late summer and fall months.

In December 2025, the County’s Department of Public Health (DPH) declared an outbreak in Willowbrook. Five cases were identified, with symptom onset between August

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and December. All individuals were hospitalized but ultimately recovered. Reported exposures included contact with free-roaming cats, opossums, and rodents, which are known to carry infected fleas. This marks the fourth documented outbreak in Willowbrook since 2017, highlighting an ongoing risk in the area.

To address these concerns, DPH plans to engage with multiple County departments, including the Departments of Public Works, Homeless Services and Housing, Animal Care and Control, and Parks and Recreation, to coordinate efforts aimed at reducing environmental risk factors. Conditions contributing to transmission include illegal dumping, overgrown vegetation, free-roaming animals (such as cats, dogs, and chickens), and the presence of homeless encampments. Additionally, DPH has conducted outreach to local hospitals to improve clinical recognition, diagnosis, and early treatment of FBT. Veterinary clinics have also been engaged to promote flea prevention practices among pet owners.

Building on these ongoing efforts across departments, there is an opportunity to strengthen coordination and better align activities to reduce environmental risk factors associated with FBT in impacted areas. Knowledge gaps remain among both residents and County departments about FBT risks and prevention strategies. The ongoing presence of FBT in Willowbrook highlights the need for sustained attention, improved coordination, and long-term solutions to reduce risk in the County. Strengthening public awareness, prevention strategies, and response efforts will support sustained, long-term efforts to reduce FBT exposure in the community.

**I THEREFORE MOVE THAT THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS:**

1. Direct the Director of the Department of Public Health (DPH), in collaboration with the Directors of the Departments of Public Works (DPW), Animal Care and Control (DACC), Homeless Services and Housing (HSH), and any other affected departments, to ensure that the Los Angeles County (County) collective response to the directives below is coordinated, aligned and strategic.

2. Direct the Director of HSH, in coordination with the Directors of DPH and DPW, to identify and prioritize encampment sanitation needs in areas impacted by flea-borne typhus (FBT) outbreaks.
3. Direct the Director of DPW, in collaboration with the Directors of DPH, HSH, DACC, and, as appropriate, the Department of Agricultural Commissioner/Weights and Measures (ACWM) and other local jurisdictions, to develop and implement a coordinated approach to reduce environmental factors contributing to FBT transmission in Willowbrook and to eliminate food sources in the streets of impacted unincorporated areas that attract animals that may carry typhus-infected fleas. This includes engaging in targeted efforts to:
  - a. Keep streets and sidewalks free of trash, garbage, fecal material, pet droppings and other food sources;
  - b. Ensure a sufficient number of waste bins to prevent trash accumulation between pick-up days; and
  - c. Help control harborage conditions in impacted unincorporated County-responsible areas, including targeted efforts to:
    - i. Keep vegetation trimmed and maintained;
    - ii. Remove cast-off items; and
    - iii. Eliminate rodent burrows in planters along streets and sidewalks.
4. Direct the Director of DACC, in coordination with the Directors of DPH and DPW, to identify flea control efforts that can be enhanced in FBT-impacted unincorporated areas.
5. Direct the Director of DPH, in collaboration with the Directors of DPW, DACC, and HSH, community groups, veterinarians, and other partners, including local schools, to:
  - a. Continue to identify areas needing immediate remediation to address the outbreak and adopt other environmental strategies that provide long term, sustainable control and reduce community conditions that

increase the risk of FBT exposure in Willowbrook and other impacted unincorporated areas; and

- b. Communicate with residents, business owners, cities and unincorporated areas about steps they can take to reduce environmental risks for FBT and mitigation strategies, including notifying owners to clean debris and refuse on private land.
6. Direct the Director of DPH, in collaboration with the Directors of DPW, HSH, DACC and, if appropriate, ACWM, to report back to the Board in writing in 90 days with reports from each department on their respective directives.

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(VG/YV/ARD)