

News Release



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Campers Offered Lake Tahoe sites

DONNER STATE PARK CLOSED BY NEVADA COUNTY PLAGUE ALERT

TRUCKEE, Calif. – State Parks officials today voluntarily closed Donner Memorial State Park in the Sierra Nevada after Nevada County health officials issued an alert for a possible outbreak of bubonic plague in the region.

While there have been no animals within the park found to be infected with plague, two animals found near the park recently tested positive for the disease, and State Park officials noted there have been recent reports of dead rodents within the park. The park has a large population of squirrels.

Campers with reservations at Donner Memorial State Park this coming Labor Day weekend were being notified today that they would be unable to use the park. They are being told their reservations will be honored at two nearby Lake Tahoe parks – Sugar Pine Point State Park and Emerald Bay State Park. If they choose to cancel their reservations, they are being offered full refunds.

Of the 145 campsites at the park, about half were on the reservation system. The others were on a first-come, first-serve status. The park was expected to be full this Labor Day weekend, traditionally the last big camping weekend of the summer.

The day-use area of the park also was closed today. However, State Parks officials said the museum at the park would remain open and would continue to operate during its normal hours, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. daily.

Outbreaks of plague have occurred in the area in the past, including at Donner Memorial State Park and other recreational areas in the greater Truckee area. This summer, Nevada County health officials issued their first alert in the Truckee area on August 15 and have issued two since, the latest on Tuesday.

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In the last week, Nevada County health officials reported finding two animals infected with the disease, a squirrel found on the east side of Donner Memorial State Park and a cat found in a residential area north of the park.

Currently, several animals from within the park are being tested for the disease. Park personnel are also walking the campground looking for dead animals. If no animals from within the park are found to be infected, there is a possibility the park will reopen Friday. If infected animals are found, the area will be treated, which will include capturing animals in the park and treating them for flea infestation.

The early human symptoms of bubonic plague include fever, chills, muscle aches, headache, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, abdominal pain and extreme exhaustion. Swollen and tender lymph nodes where the infected flea bit the person are typical of bubonic plague. If left untreated, the disease can be fatal in humans.

Symptoms usually develop in two to six days in humans following contact with the infective organism. Any person becoming ill within seven days of being in a plague area is urged to contact a physician immediately.

But health officials said the bacterial infection called plague is easily avoided by following some common-sense precautions:

- Avoid rodents and their burrows. Dogs and cats should be also kept away from burrows;
- Avoid all contact with squirrels or rodents, sick or otherwise;
- Alternatively, spray yourself with insect repellent, particularly around your legs and arms;
- Keep pets inside as much as possible and avoid letting them run loose;
- Wear long pants tucked into boot tops in infested areas;
- If your pet becomes sick, avoid handling and contact with it, especially face-to-face contact;

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