

hidden leprosy cases, and environmental reservoir) of prolonged exposure of *M. lepromatosis* to the study patient in his vicinity. Thus, the assertion of Virk et al. (1) that United States citizens can acquire *M. lepromatosis* when traveling to Mexico or other leprosy-endemic areas as tourists is misleading and demands extensive research to prove it.

In addition, it is intriguing to note that host genetic determinants can influence the acquisition and onset of leprosy (5). Therefore, the inference of a single case study cannot be generalized for all citizens of the United States. The data from these reports suggest that the epidemiologic studies of leprosy in nonendemic areas should consider travel history to delineate this issue.

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## Spread of Plague by Respiratory Droplets or Ectoparasites

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**To the Editor:** Drancourt and Raoult (1) have emphasized the risk of overestimation of pneumonic plague contagion by respiratory droplets and hypothesize that only transmission of *Yersinia pestis* by ectoparasites, such as lice and fleas, by close contact with infected humans can sustain outbreaks and epidemics. The outbreak of pneumonic plague in Madagascar in 2017 (2) reminds us that plague remains a potential serious threat in locations that are relatively inaccessible or have limited capacity for a robust public health response. Records describe substantial outbreaks of pneumonic plague (3) but portray a more dangerous disease than that described by Drancourt and Raoult. High rates of transmission are possible (4) when pneumonic plague is spreading through social networks, in a way similar to that observed in West Africa during the recent epidemic of Ebola virus disease (5). The Ebola virus is not thought to be easily transmitted but is clearly capable of generating a sustained epidemic.

The role of ectoparasites in the transmission of *Y. pestis* should not be dismissed. However, until a substantial epidemic has been documented with this proven etiology, this explanation of plagues, both historical and modern, must remain in the realm of conjecture.

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