

Tularemia Fact Sheet

Tularemia is an infection caused by a bacterium called *Francisella tularensis*

The bacteria is common in warm-blooded wild animals, especially rabbits, hares, voles, muskrats, beavers, and some domestic animals. (Tularemia is sometimes also called "rabbit fever.") The organism can also be found in hard ticks.

People can get tularemia from infected animals, ticks, deerflies, or mosquitoes

People usually catch tularemia from the bite of wood ticks, dog ticks, or lone star ticks. People also can get infected while handling carcasses of infected animals (e.g., during skinning or dressing); by drinking contaminated water; by handling or eating undercooked meats of infected animals; by breathing in dust from infected soil, grain or hay; and from infected pelts and paws of animals. You can't catch tularemia from another person.

Symptoms appear in 1 to 14 days (usually 3 to 5 days)

The first symptoms of tularemia are most often a slowly developing sore at the site where the bacteria entered the skin and swelling of the lymph glands. Sometimes there are no ulcers, but lymph glands will swell up and open to drain. When the bacteria are taken in through the mouth (e.g., by food or water), symptoms may include a severe sore throat, stomach pain, diarrhea, and vomiting. If the bacteria are breathed in, the disease may be very serious and cause a severe lung infection or a blood stream infection, which can cause death if not treated.

Tularemia infections can be treated with antibiotics

Tularemia infections can be prevented

- Avoid areas infested with ticks or mosquitoes.
- Use insect repellents and wear protective clothing when outdoors (long pants and long-sleeved shirts, tuck pant legs into socks, and tuck shirt into pants).
- Inspect your entire body (head to toe) for ticks after being outdoors.
- Remove attached ticks by grasping the tick close to the skin surface and pulling straight back with a steady force; use pointed tweezers to grasp the tick. If fingers must be used, protect hands by using gloves, cloth, or tissue. Do not squeeze the tick's body or use petroleum jelly, lighted cigarettes or matches, or alcohol. Clean the bite site after removing a tick and then wash your hands.
- Wear gloves when handling (e.g., skinning or dressing) carcasses of dead animals, especially rabbits, squirrels, and rodents. Wash hands thoroughly after handling animal carcasses.
- Cook all wild animal meat, such as rabbit or squirrel, until well done.
- Wash hands thoroughly after working with soil, before and after handling foods, and before eating.
- Do not drink, bathe, swim, or work in untreated water areas where infected wild animals may have been.

Cases of tularemia with pneumonia should be reported immediately to the local health department