



Tularemia Fact Sheet

What is tularemia?

Tularemia is an illness that affects both animals and man. It is caused by bacteria, which can live for 3 to 4 months in mud, water or dead animals. Humans can catch tularemia by handling infected animals or from bites by infected flies, mosquitoes or ticks. Most people become ill in either the summer or the winter. In the summer, the ticks that carry tularemia become more active. During the winter hunting season, illness can result from contact with infected rabbits (usually from skinning them).

Who gets tularemia?

Anyone can get tularemia if they spend much time outdoors in areas where ticks can be found. Hunters are especially at high risk for infection.

How is tularemia spread?

Tick bites are the most common way of spreading tularemia to people. Another way people can get tularemia is by getting blood or tissue from infected animals (especially rabbits) in their eyes, mouth or in cuts or scratches on the skin. Handling or eating rabbit meat that is not cooked well can also spread tularemia. Although it rarely results from the bite or scratch of an infected animal, tularemia can be spread from handling the contaminated skins or paws of animals. Infection can also result from breathing dust containing the bacteria. Person to person spread does not occur.

What are the symptoms of tularemia?

- Sudden fever
- Chills
- Headaches
- Diarrhea
- Muscle aches
- Joint pain
- Dry cough
- Progressive weakness

Pneumonia with chest pain, cough, and difficulty breathing may also be observed. Depending on how you were exposed, other symptoms may be present. For example, those who ingested tularemia may have ulcers inside

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(405) 425-4437*



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their mouth, while those with blood splatter to the eyes may have swollen and painful eyes. Symptoms appear between 1 and 14 days, but usually after 3-5 days.

What is the treatment for tularemia?

Antibiotics are typically prescribed for tularemia. A vaccine is under development, but not available at this time.

Can a person get tularemia again?

After recovering from tularemia, a person probably will not get it again for a long time. However, second infections can occur.

What can be done to prevent the spread of tularemia?

Rubber gloves should be worn when skinning or handling animals, especially rabbits. Wild rabbit and rodent (such as squirrel) meat should be cooked completely before eating. In the spring and summer, look for attached ticks every two to three hours if outside for long periods. Remove any attached ticks immediately. Use insect and tick repellents when spending time outdoors. Wear long sleeved clothing. Do not drink untreated surface water. Minimize any contact your pets may have with ticks.

How should a tick be removed?

Any tick should be removed as soon as possible. The best way is to use tweezers to grab the tick as close to the skin as possible and pull it straight out. Do not squeeze the tick's body when removing it. Do not handle ticks with bare hands. Wash your hands after removing a tick. You may want to apply an antiseptic on the bite. If illness does occur, be sure to tell your doctor that a tick bit you.

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