

## **TULAREMIA (RABBIT FEVER, DEER-FLY FEVER)**

### **What is tularemia?**

Tularemia is an infectious bacterial disease. Tularemia is usually a disease of wild animals, but severe illness and death may also occur in humans.

### **How is tularemia spread?**

The bacterium that causes tularemia is common in various kinds of ticks and in small and medium-sized mammals, especially rabbits, hares, beavers, muskrats, and voles. In the United States, there are two main sources of infection for humans: 1) bites by ticks or biting flies, and 2) contact with infected animals or their carcasses, especially the cottontail rabbit. People may also become infected from eating improperly cooked rabbit or hare meat or from contact with contaminated water, dust, hay, mud, or animal bites. The disease is not spread from human-to-human.

### **Who gets tularemia?**

Hunters, trappers, wildlife specialists, and others who handle or eat infected animals are most likely to become infected. Persons exposed to bites of certain ticks and some species of biting flies are also at some risk of becoming infected. Tularemia can occur at any age.

### **What are the symptoms of tularemia?**

Symptoms of tularemia in humans appear about three to five days after infection. They may include chills, fever, headache, generalized body ache, cough, and chest pain or tightness. The bacteria multiply in the skin at the bite or wound site, usually causing an ulcer to form. From this site, bacteria spread to lymph nodes and may spread further if bacterial growth has not slowed. Without treatment, symptoms usually last for several weeks. Occasionally, tularemia will spread to other sites in the body, resulting in pneumonia, sepsis (blood infection), or meningitis.

### **How is tularemia diagnosed?**

Tularemia is diagnosed by a blood test for antibodies to the bacterium. Tularemia can also be identified by growing the bacteria under special conditions in a laboratory.

### **What is the treatment for tularemia?**

Antibiotics are used to treat people with tularemia.

### **How can tularemia be prevented?**

To prevent infections, avoid exposure to bites by ticks and blood-feeding flies and avoid direct contact with wild animal tissues. When you enter areas infested with biting flies and ticks, wear protective clothing, tuck pants into socks, and apply insect repellents as directed by the manufacturer. Examine clothing and skin frequently for ticks. Remove

attached ticks promptly. Hunters and trappers need to wear gloves, masks, and protective eye covers when handling animal carcasses. Animals that appear ill should not be skinned or dressed. Teach children to not handle any sick or dead animals.

**Where can I get more information about tularemia?**

Websites with good information about tularemia are:

[http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/diseases/submenus/sub\\_tularemia.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/diseases/submenus/sub_tularemia.htm)

<http://www.ci.nyc.ny.us/html/doh/html/cd/cdtul.html>

<http://hlunix.hl.state.ut.us/els/epidemiology/epifacts/tularem.html>