



Tularemia

What is Tularemia?

Tularemia, also known as “rabbit fever,” is a disease caused by bacteria (*Francisella tularensis*) that can affect animals and humans.

Tularemia is typically found in animals, especially rabbits, rodents, muskrats and beavers, but can also be carried in ticks. Tularemia disease is rare in Canada. There have been a few reported cases in Canada but there have been no known deaths as a result of Tularemia in Canada since the 1930s.

How is it spread?

Typically, people become infected through the bite of infected ticks or when a deerfly or mosquito bite an ill animal then bite a human.

People can also become infected by handling or touching infected sick or dead animals, by eating undercooked meats, particularly game, or by inhaling airborne bacteria. Hunters, trappers and other people who spend a lot of time outdoors in contact with wild animals are at a greater risk of being exposed.

Tularemia is not known to be spread from person to person.

What symptoms should I watch for?

Symptoms of Tularemia vary and depend on how someone was exposed to the bacteria. Most people will have a sudden high fever, chills, sore muscles, and headache. Other symptoms that may or may not develop include: swollen glands, ulcers around a recent tick or deerfly bite, eye infections, sore throat, dry cough and chest pain. Many people with Tularemia also develop pneumonia. The disease can be fatal if it is not treated with the right antibiotics.

Symptoms usually appear 3 to 5 days, but can take as long as 14 days following exposure.

What is the treatment for Tularemia?

Antibiotics are available for the treatment of Tularemia. See your health care provider to discuss these options.

How do I protect myself and others?

Tularemia occurs naturally in many parts of North America. Good prevention methods are to:

- Use insect repellents containing DEET to reduce insect bites.
- Wear long sleeve clothing when outdoors in long grasses and check yourself and your pets for ticks when you get home.
- Rubber gloves should be worn when skinning or handling animals, especially rabbits.
- Wash your hands often, especially after touching/petting an animal or handling animal carcasses.
- Children should be instructed not to handle sick or dead animals.
- Cook your food thoroughly, particularly wild game.
- Avoid bathing, swimming or working in contaminated untreated water.
- Only drink water from a safe source.

Call the Communicable Disease Team: ext. 8809