

TULAREMIA (RABBIT FEVER, DEER-FLY FEVER)

What is tularemia?

Tularemia is an infectious disease caused by bacteria called *Francisella tularensis*. Tularemia is usually a disease of wild animals, but severe illness and death may also occur in people who are infected with the bacteria.

How do people get tularemia?

There are many different ways in which tularemia can be transmitted to people. Most commonly, people get tularemia through direct contact with infected wild animals, usually rabbits. People may also be infected if they eat meat from an infected animal. Tularemia can be transmitted through the bite of certain types of ticks--in California, the Pacific coast tick (*Dermacentor occidentalis*) and the American dog tick (*Dermacentor variabilis*)--and deerflies (*Chrysops discalis*). (See [Ticks in California ID card](#).) Rarely, people can get tularemia through contact with contaminated water or breathing air in which tularemia organisms have become aerosolized. The disease is not spread from person to person.

What are the symptoms of tularemia?

Symptoms of tularemia in people appear about three to five days after infection. They may include chills, fever, headache, generalized body ache, cough, and pain or tightness in the chest. An ulcer may form at the bite or wound site. Tularemia patients often have swollen, painful lymph nodes in the neck, underarm, or groin. If not treated, tularemia bacteria can spread to other parts of the body and cause pneumonia, blood infection, conjunctivitis (red, swollen eyelids), or meningitis.

How is tularemia diagnosed?

Tularemia is diagnosed by a blood test for antibodies to the bacterium. Tularemia can also be diagnosed by observing or growing the bacteria from blood or other tissues in a laboratory.

What is the treatment for tularemia?

There are effective antibiotics to treat patients with tularemia.

How can tularemia be prevented?

Avoid touching or handling carcasses or tissues from wild animals. Meat from wild game should be handled only while wearing gloves and should be thoroughly cooked before it is eaten. Prevent bites from ticks and flies by wearing protective clothing and applying insect repellents as directed by the manufacturer. Examine your clothing and skin frequently for ticks and promptly remove any ticks.

Where can I get more information about tularemia?

For more information about tularemia, please visit the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention websites at:

<http://www.cdc.gov/Tularemia/>

<http://www.bt.cdc.gov/agent/tularemia/>