



Houston Department of  
Health and Human Services

## TULAREMIA FACT SHEET

### **What is tularemia?**

Tularemia, also known as rabbit fever, is a disease caused by the bacterium *Francisella tularensis*. Tularemia is normally an infection of animals.

### **How do you get it?**

Rabbits and small rodents are the most common animals that can be infected with tularemia, but infections have been seen in other wild animals and occasionally domestic pets. People can be exposed to the disease in several ways. The most common way tularemia can be transmitted is by ticks, deerflies and sometimes by mosquitoes. Other ways people can get tularemia are by handling infected animals, by eating or drinking contaminated food or water, or by breathing the bacteria in dust from contaminated soil, grain or hay.

### **What are the symptoms?**

People will have different symptoms depending on the way they are exposed to tularemia. When the disease is transmitted by a tick, deerfly or mosquito the bite will usually become an ulcer (sore) and glands near the bite will swell. Handling or skinning infected animals can also cause similar symptoms through broken skin. Sore throat, stomach pain, diarrhea and vomiting can occur from eating or drinking contaminated food and water. When people breathe in the bacteria, symptoms can include fever, body aches, dry cough and pneumonia. Infection of the eyes (conjunctivitis) can also occur when the bacteria gets in the eyes. This can happen from contaminated hands or dust.

### **How soon do infected people get sick?**

When someone is exposed to tularemia, they will usually get sick in 3 to 5 days, but this time can range from 1 to 14 days.

### **What should I do if I think I have been exposed to tularemia?**

If you think you have tularemia you should contact your doctor. Antibiotics may be required to treat tularemia. Some infections of tularemia can be more serious than others and antibiotics should be started quickly.

### **How can we prevent tularemia?**

Because tularemia is common in animals, mostly in rural areas of the SouthCentral and Western United States, the public should be educated to:

- avoid ticks, deerflies and mosquitoes
- use gloves when handling or skinning potentially infected animals
- cook meat of wild rabbits or rodents (such as squirrels) thoroughly before eating.

<http://www.houstontx.gov/health>  
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**Where can I get more information on tularemia?**

[www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)

[www.tdh.state.tx.us](http://www.tdh.state.tx.us)

**Source of information:**

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

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