



TULAREMIA (Rabbit Fever)

What is TULAREMIA?

Tularemia, often called Rabbit Fever, is a bacterial disease caused by the bacterium, *Francisella tularensis*. Tularemia infects both man and animals. Although many wild and domestic animals can carry the bacteria, rabbits are most often involved in disease outbreaks. Tularemia in humans is rare in the State of Delaware.

Who gets tularemia?

People who spend much time outdoors are at greatest risk. People who come in contact with flesh or blood from infected animals are at greatest risk of contracting this disease. High-risk occupations include laboratory workers, farmers, veterinarians, sheep workers, hunters, trappers or meat handlers.

How is tularemia spread?

Tularemia is not spread from person to person. However, many routes of human exposure to tularemia are known to exist. The common routes include contamination of the skin or mucous membranes with blood or tissue while handling infected animals; bites from infected ticks or deer flies; or handling or eating insufficiently cooked rabbit meat. Less common means of spread are drinking contaminated water; inhaling dust from contaminated soil; or handling contaminated pelts or paws of animals.

What are the symptoms of tularemia?

Symptoms depend on whether the bacteria enter through the skin, gastrointestinal tract, or lungs. Usually, there is an ulcerative skin lesion and swollen glands. Ingesting the organism produces a throat infection, abdominal pain, diarrhea and vomiting. Inhalation produces a fever, possibly with a pneumonia-like illness.

How soon do symptoms appear?

Symptoms can appear within 1-14 days. On average, they occur within 3-5 days.

What is the treatment for tularemia?

Certain antibiotics, including streptomycin, gentamicin and tobramycin, are effective in treating tularemia.

How can the spread of tularemia be prevented?

- Wear rubber gloves when skinning or handling any animals.
- Thoroughly cook wild rabbit, muskrat and squirrel meat before eating.
- Avoid drinking, swimming or working in untreated water.
- Wear light-colored clothing to spot ticks.
- Use insect repellents containing DEET on your skin or permethrin (Permanone) on your clothing. Follow the directions on the package insert, especially before using on children.