



TULAREMIA

What is tularemia?

Tularemia is an infectious disease caused by a hardy bacterium, *Francisella tularensis*, found in animals (especially rodents, rabbits and hares). It is a wide-spread disease of animals. Approximately 200 cases of tularemia in humans are reported annually in the United States, mostly in persons living in the south-central and western states.

What are the symptoms?

Depending on the way a person is exposed, the tularemia bacteria may cause skin ulcers, swollen and painful lymph glands, inflamed eyes, sore throat, oral ulcers or pneumonia. If the bacteria were inhaled, symptoms would include abrupt onset of fever, chills, headache, muscle aches, joint pain, dry cough and progressive weakness. People with pneumonia can develop chest pain, difficulty breathing, bloody sputum and respiratory failure.

How is it spread?

Nearly all cases occur in rural areas and are associated with the bites of infective ticks and biting flies or with the handling of infected rodents, rabbits or hares. Typically, people become infected through the bites of ticks and deerflies that have fed on an infected animal, by handling infected animal carcasses, or by eating or drinking contaminated food or water. Occasional cases result from inhaling infectious aerosols and from laboratory accidents. *Francisella tularensis* bacterium can remain alive for weeks in water and soil. Tularemia has not been known to spread from person to person.

How is it treated?

After potential exposure or diagnosis, early treatment with antibiotics is recommended. Sensitivity testing of the tularemia bacterium can be done in the early stages of a response to determine which antibiotics would be most effective. The disease can be fatal if it is not treated with the appropriate antibiotics. In the past, a vaccine has been used to protect laboratory workers. It is under review by the Food and Drug Administration and is not currently available in the United States.

What should I do if I think I have tularemia?

Seek prompt medical attention. If you have been exposed to *Francisella tularensis*, your doctor may recommend treatment with antibiotics for 14 days after exposure.

What is Tarrant County doing about it?

Tarrant County Public Health works with local health professionals to increase its ability to more quickly test and identify biological agents. When a case of tularemia is confirmed, public health confers with state and federal authorities to determine appropriate containment or control measures.

Where can I get more information?

You can visit us online (<http://health.tarrantcounty.com>); call our Epidemiology and Health Information office at 817-321-5350; contact the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at 1-888-246-2675 (www.bt.cdc.gov).