

# Tularemia

## What is tularemia?

Tularemia is a rare bacterial disease. It is also known as “rabbit fever,” and is often found in rabbits, rodents, and hares. Tularemia has been reported all states except Hawaii. It is most common in the south central United States, the Pacific Northwest, and parts of Massachusetts.



## How do people get tularemia?

The bacteria that causes tularemia can enter the body through the skin, eyes, mouth or lungs. The symptoms of infection depend on how the bacteria enter the body. People can become infected through a tick or deerfly bite. Infections can also occur from an open cut that is exposed to infected animal issue. Drinking contaminated water or eating undercooked contaminated meat can also cause the infection. Outdoor activities such as mowing grass can also expose a person to the bacteria..

## What animals are known to spread tularemia to humans?

- Ticks
- Deer flies
- Rabbits
- Muskrats
- Prairie dogs
- Other rodents



Domestic cats are very susceptible to tularemia and have been known to transmit the bacteria to humans.

## What are the symptoms of tularemia?

Symptoms usually appear 3 to 5 days after exposure, but can take as long as 14 days. Symptoms vary depending on how the bacteria entered the body and can include:

- Sudden fever, chills, headaches, diarrhea, muscle aches, joint pain, dry cough, and progressive weakness
- Swelling of lymph nodes, sore throat, mouth sores, chest pain, or swollen and painful eyes

## How is tularemia diagnosed?

Tularemia is a rare disease and can be difficult to diagnose. The symptoms can be mistaken for other, more common, illnesses. It is important to share with your health care provider any exposures to sick or dead animals and tick and deer fly bites. Blood tests can help confirm the diagnosis.

## What is the treatment for giardiasis?

Tularemia is treated with antibiotics. This treatment is effective when the illness is diagnosed early. If you experience flu-like symptoms combined with a swollen lymph node, and have been exposed to a sick or dead animal or have been bitten by ticks or deerflies, see your healthcare provider immediately.

Although symptoms may last for several weeks, most people completely recover. There is no vaccine for tularemia.

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## How do I protect myself and my family from tularemia?

- Avoid contact with wild rodents, rabbits, and hares.
- Do not touch sick or dead animals.
- Remove any dead animals from your property by using a shovel or gloves to place the animal in double bags. Place bagged animal in a covered outdoor trash container. Afterwards, wash hands with soap and running water. Disinfect tools with a 10% bleach solution for 10 minutes.
- Use impervious gloves when skinning or handling dead animals, especially rabbits, muskrats, prairie dogs, and other rodents.
- Prevent insect bites: use insect repellent containing DEET on your skin, or treat clothing with insect repellent.
- Wear a dust mask over your nose and mouth during any activities that may stir up contaminated dust, such as mowing in areas where rodents and rabbits might live.
- Be sure that food (especially game animals) is cooked thoroughly (165°F) and that your water is from a safe source.

## How do I protect my pets from tularemia?

- Treat dogs for ticks. Dogs are highly susceptible to tick bites and tick-borne disease. Regularly treat dogs with pesticides that kill ticks using products recommended by your veterinarian.
- Check dogs for ticks after returning from tick habitats. The most common location for ticks on dogs include the ears, arm pits, groin and between the toes. Remove attached ticks from people or pets



## removing a tick



## How do I remove a tick?

1. Use fine-tipped tweezers to grasp the tick as close to the skin's surface as possible.
2. Pull upward with steady pressure. Don't twist or jerk the tick: this can cause the mouthparts to break off and remain in the skin.
3. After removing the tick, thoroughly clean the bite area and your hands with rubbing alcohol, an iodine scrub, or soap and water.
4. Dispose of a live tick by submerging it in alcohol, placing it in a sealed bag/container, wrapping it tightly in tape, or flushing it down the toilet. Never crush a tick with your fingers.

Avoid folklore remedies such as "painting" the tick with nail polish or petroleum jelly, or using heat to make the tick detach from the skin.

If you develop a rash or fever within several weeks of removing a tick, see your doctor. Be sure to tell the doctor about the tick bite, when the bite occurred, and where you most likely acquired the tick.