

## **Rabbits and Tularemia Information**

### **August 2014**



Recently, “Rabbit Fever” also known as Tularemia has been reported on several local Denver news stations. Rabbits are sensitive to tularemia infection and rabbit die offs have occurred in a number of Colorado counties, some testing positive for tularemia. Below are frequently asked questions regarding tularemia and rabbits.

#### **Question: How do people get tularemia?**

**Answer:** Tularemia is transmitted through being bitten by an infected deer fly, tick or other insect, directly handling infected animals (such as through skinning), eating or drinking contaminated food or water, and breathing in the bacteria through contaminated dust or aerosols such as after running over dead carcasses with lawn mowers.

#### **Question: How can I protect myself and my family from tularemia?**

**Answer:** Avoid direct contact with rabbits and other rodents. Do not touch sick or dead animals. Use impervious gloves when skinning dead animals, especially rabbits. Prevent insect bites by wearing insect repellent containing DEET on your skin, or treat clothing with repellent containing permethrin. Avoid mowing over sick or dead animals. Wear a dust mask over your nose and mouth during activities that may stir up dust where rabbits live, such as mowing. Wash hands well with soap and warm water after any contact with soil, untreated water, or handling sick or dead animals.

See a physician if you become ill with flu-like symptoms and/or a swollen lymph node within two weeks of a tick or deerfly bite or having contact with a sick or dead animal. Tularemia is a treatable illness. In Colorado, only 1 to 5 human cases of tularemia are reported each year.

#### **Question: How can I protect my pets from tularemia?**

**Answer:** You can protect your pets from tularemia by using flea and tick repellents and keeping them on a leash and away from wildlife. Also, do not feed pets raw meat, especially from wild animals. Consult a veterinarian if your pet develops unusual symptoms.

#### **Question: How should I dispose of dead rabbits?**

**Answer:** Remove any dead animals from your property by using a shovel or gloves to place the animal in double bags and then in a covered outdoor trash container for disposal. Afterwards, wash hands well with soap and running water and disinfect tools with a 10% bleach solution for 10 minutes.

#### **Question: How do I get rid of rabbits in my yard?**

**Answer:** Tri-County Health Department recommends contacting a pest control company with any questions about getting rid of rabbits.

#### **The following links contain more information:**

CDC Tularemia Facts: <http://www.cdc.gov/tularemia/>

Tri-County Tularemia Factsheet: <http://www.tchd.org/DocumentCenter/View/1290>