

TULAREMIA (RABBIT FEVER)



Tularemia is a potentially serious illness caused by a bacterium named *Francisella tularensis*. Humans and several species of animals (rabbits, muskrats, rodents, wildlife, pets, etc.) are susceptible to infection. Cats are very susceptible to tularemia and have been known to transmit the bacteria to humans. Ticks and deer flies can also carry and spread the bacteria. Tularemia is rare in Wisconsin, averaging about two cases per year.

How is it spread?



- ▶ Tularemia is not spread from one person to another.
- ▶ The bacteria can be passed between animals and humans. This usually occurs through:
 - ▶ Being bitten by an infected tick or deer fly.
 - ▶ Handling or being bitten by an infected animal.
 - ▶ Consuming undercooked meat from an infected animal.
- ▶ Drinking or cooking with non-potable water poses a risk of infection by *F. tularensis*.
- ▶ Although rare, it is also possible to inhale *F. tularensis* during farming or landscaping if machinery runs over infected animals or carcasses and releases the bacteria into the air.

What are the signs and symptoms?

Symptoms vary and depend on the route of entry of the bacteria. They usually begin within 3–5 days of being exposed.

Common Symptoms

- ▶ Fever or chills
- ▶ Swollen lymph nodes (often near where the bacteria has entered the body)
- ▶ Skin sore or ulcer

Other Possible Symptoms

- ▶ Diarrhea or vomiting
- ▶ Pain, redness, or swelling of the eye
- ▶ Cough, difficulty breathing
- ▶ Sore throat

What are the treatment options?

Tularemia is treated with antibiotics.

How can it be prevented?

- ▶ Avoid tick and deer fly bites by using an insect repellent and wearing protective clothes.
- ▶ Use gloves when handling wild animals or their carcasses.
- ▶ Ensure that wild meats are fully-cooked, and do not drink untreated surface water.
- ▶ Keep cats indoors to prevent them from hunting small mammals. This protects you and your pet.
- ▶ Thoroughly wash animal bites and consult a healthcare provider when necessary.

