

What is tularemia?

Tularemia is an illness that affects both animals and man. It is caused by the bacteria *Francisella tularensis*, which can live for 3 - 4 months in mud, water, or the carcasses of dead animals. Humans can catch tularemia by handling infected animals or from bites by infected flies, mosquitoes, or ticks.

What are the symptoms of an infection with tularemia?

Most people become ill in either the summer or winter. In the summer, the ticks that carry tularemia become more active. During the winter hunting season, illness can result from contact with infected rabbits (usually skinning them). Usually there is sudden onset of fever with headache and fatigue that lasts for several weeks. With skin contact or a tick bite, there will be an ulcer (open sore) with swelling of the lymph nodes (glands under the jaw and arms, neck etc.), and a rash may also be present. Eating or drinking food or water containing the bacteria, may produce a throat infection, stomach pain, diarrhea and/or vomiting. Breathing dust containing the bacteria may produce a pneumonia-like illness. Fever, chills, headache, chest pain and coughing may also occur.

How soon do symptoms appear?

Symptoms usually appear within 1 - 14 days after exposure to the bacteria. The average time is 3 - 5 days.

How is tularemia spread?

Contact with small animals such as rabbits, hares, rodents, birds, or their ticks transmit tularemia. Handling carcasses of infected animals (e.g., hunters while skinning the animal), ingesting undercooked infected meat, drinking contaminated water and inhalation of dust from contaminated soil, grain or hay transmits tularemia. It is also transmitted by tick bites but rarely is it transmitted through the bite of an infected animal (e.g., coyote, squirrel, skunk, hog, cat, or dog). It is not spread from human to human.

Who gets tularemia infection?

Any person can become infected. Numerous wild animals especially rabbits, hares, voles, muskrats, beavers and some domestic animals; as well as various hard ticks can carry or become ill with tularemia. People become infected if they spend a lot of time outdoors or are in close contact with any of the before mentioned animals or ticks.

For how long is a person infectious?

People cannot spread tularemia so this is not a concern.

What is the treatment for tularemia?

Antibiotics are prescribed and most people fully recover. If someone has been exposed, an antibiotic should be started as soon as possible.

Do infected people need to be excluded from school, work, or child care?

No, because they do not transmit the disease.

What can be done to help prevent the spread of tularemia?

Rubber gloves should be worn when skinning or handling animals, especially rabbits. Wild rabbit and rodent (such as squirrel) meat should be cooked completely before eating. Avoid tick bites, by using insect and tick repellents and wearing long sleeves and pants when spending long periods of time outside. In the spring and summer, look for attached ticks every two to three hours when spending time outside. Remove any attached ticks immediately. Avoid swimming, drinking, bathing in untreated water where infection is prevalent among wild animals. Persons working in laboratories with this bacterium must take protective measures, including the use of face masks, gowns, and impervious gloves, and negative pressure microbiological cabinets.