

Fact sheet

Tularemia (Rabbit fever)

What is tularemia?

Tularemia, also known as “rabbit fever,” is a bacterial disease affecting both humans and animals, caused by the bacteria *Francisella tularensis*.

How is tularemia spread?

Tularemia can be spread in various ways:

- Through bites from infected ticks, deer flies, or other insects.
- Skin contact with infected animals.
- Consuming contaminated food or water.
- Inhaling dust that’s contaminated with the bacteria, *F. tularensis*.

Tularemia does not spread from person to person.

Who is at risk for tularemia?

Anyone can get tularemia, but those who spend a lot of time outdoors are at higher risk due to potential exposure to infected ticks, animals, or a contaminated area where an infected animal has died. People who handle or skin wild animals, particularly rabbits, are at risk of tularemia exposure. Laboratory workers who handle *F. tularensis* cultures are also vulnerable.

What are the symptoms of tularemia?

Symptoms may include sudden fever, chills, headaches, diarrhea, muscle and joint pain, dry cough, and progressive weakness.

Pneumonia symptoms can also occur, such as chest pain, coughing, and difficulty breathing. Other symptoms of tularemia depend on how a person was exposed to the tularemia bacteria. These symptoms can include ulcers on the skin or mouth, swollen and painful lymph glands, swollen and painful eyes, and a sore throat.

How soon do symptoms appear after exposure?

Symptoms typically appear 3-5 days after exposure, though it can take up to 14 days. If a person experiences fever or extreme soreness near a tick bite within 2 weeks of exposure, it is important to contact a doctor as soon as possible.

What is the treatment for tularemia?

Doctors prescribe specific antibiotics to treat tularemia.

Does past infection provide immunity?

While some may have long-term immunity, reinfection cases have been reported.

What can be done to prevent the spread of tularemia?

When hiking, camping, or working outdoors:

- Use an Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)-registered insect repellent.
- Wear long pants, long sleeves, and long socks.

- Promptly remove attached ticks using fine-tipped tweezers.
- Don't drink untreated surface water.

When mowing or landscaping:

- Don't mow over sick or dead animals. When possible, check the area for carcasses prior to mowing.

If you hunt, trap, or skin animals:

- Use gloves when handling animals, especially rabbits, muskrats, prairie dogs, and other rodents.
- Cook game meat thoroughly.

How should a tick be removed?

Use tweezers to grasp the tick as close to the skin as possible and pull it straight out. Avoid squeezing the tick's body and do not handle ticks with bare hands.

Where can I get more information?

- Your personal healthcare provider
- Your [local health department](#)
- [Utah Department of Health and Human Services](#)
- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#)