

Tularemia

Fact Sheet

What is Tularemia?

Tularemia is a potentially serious illness that is caused by a bacterium *Francisella tularensis* found in animals (especially rodents, rabbits, and hares).

What are the symptoms?

- sudden fever
- chills
- headaches
- diarrhea
- muscle aches
- joint pain
- dry cough
- progressive weakness

People can also develop pneumonia with chest pain, cough, and difficulty breathing.

Other symptoms depend on how a person was exposed to the 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 does it spread?

People can get infected in many different ways:

- being bitten by an infected tick, deerfly or other insect
- handling infected animal carcasses
- eating or drinking contaminated food or water
- breathing in the bacteria

It is not known to be spread from person to person. People who are ill do not need to be isolated. People who have been exposed to the bacteria should be treated as soon as possible. The disease can be fatal if it is not treated with the right antibiotics.

How soon do infected people get sick?

Symptoms usually appear 3 to 5 days after exposure to the bacteria, but can take as long as 14 days.

What should I do if I think I have it?

Consult your doctor at the first sign of illness. Be sure to let the doctor know if you are pregnant or have a weakened immune system.

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How is it treated?

Your doctor will most likely prescribe antibiotics. These must be taken exactly as prescribed to ensure the best possible result. Let your doctor know if you have any allergies to antibiotics.

What can I do to prevent becoming infected?

Use insect repellent containing DEET on your skin, or treat clothing with repellent containing permethrin, to prevent insect bites. Use care and wear gloves when handling sick or dead animals. Be sure to cook your food thoroughly and only drink water from a safe source. Note any change in the behavior of your pets (especially rodents, rabbits, and hares) or livestock. Consult a veterinarian if they develop unusual symptoms.

Other Questions?

Talk to your health care provider or call our Communicable Disease Program at 613-966-5500 x349. Toll Free 1-800-267-2803 | TTY Dial 711 (1-800-267-6511) | www.hpepublichealth.ca

Reference

- Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, Tularemia, January 2008.

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