

# Tularemia

## What is tularemia?

- Tularemia is an infection caused by the bacteria *Francisella tularensis* that can affect animals and humans. About 200 cases of human tularemia are reported each year in the United States. Bites from infected ticks and the handling of infected rabbits are responsible for most tularemia cases in the United States. If tularemia were to be released intentionally, as in a bioterror event, the bacteria would most likely be released into the air to be breathed in.

## How is tularemia spread? What are the symptoms?

- You can get tularemia by handling infected animals, by eating or drinking contaminated food or water or by inhaling contaminated dusts or sprays. Tularemia is not spread from person to person.
- Depending on the type of exposure tularemia can occur in several forms:
  - *Infection of the lungs (pneumonic)* — is the most common form and is caused by inhaling the bacteria through contaminated dusts or aerosols.
  - *Enlargement of lymph glands in the neck and inflammation of the throat* — occurs most commonly after ingesting contaminated food or water.
  - *Swollen lymph glands with or without a skin ulcer* — can occur after handling contaminated materials or being bitten by infected ticks or other biting insects such as deer flies
- All forms of the disease are accompanied by flu-like symptoms, such as fever, chills, headaches, body aches and weakness that usually occur three to five days after exposure to the bacteria. A person with pneumonia can develop chest pain, difficulty breathing and respiratory failure.

## **Preventive measures**

- If you have symptoms, please consult a healthcare provider as soon as possible. If you believe you have been intentionally exposed to tularemia, you should contact law enforcement officials immediately.
- In the event of exposure to tularemia, antibiotic treatment to prevent infection may be recommended. Currently there is no vaccine available for general use.

## **Treatment for tularemia**

Early treatment of tularemia with appropriate antibiotics is essential. Antibiotics should be used to prevent or treat tularemia only under the direction of your health care provider or local health department.



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