

Tularemia

Tularemia

- Caused by *Francisella tularensis*, a bacterium.
- People can get infected from the bite of a tick or deer fly; while handling carcasses of infected animals (e.g., during skinning or dressing); by drinking contaminated water; by handling or eating undercooked meats of infected animals; and by breathing in dust from infected soil, grain or hay.
 - In Maryland, the ticks that transmit tularemia are the American dog tick (*Dermacentor variabilis*) and the lone star tick (*Amblyomma americanum*).
- You cannot catch tularemia from another person.

Recognize the symptoms

- Depending on how the bacterium enters the body, tularemia can present in many forms.
 - All forms are accompanied by fever which can be as high as 104 °F.
 - Other symptoms that may occur include chills, headaches, muscle aches, joint pain, dry cough, and progressive weakness.
- The severity of tularemia ranges from mild to life-threatening.
- The forms of tularemia include:
 - Ulceroglandular tularemia can occur following a tick or deer fly bite or after handling an infected animal. A skin ulcer appears at the site where the organism entered the body and is accompanied by swelling of regional lymph glands.
 - Glandular tularemia is acquired through the bite of an infected tick or deer fly or from handling sick or dead animals; there is swelling of lymph glands but no ulcer.
 - Oculoglandular tularemia occurs when the bacteria enter through the eye, such as when a person butchers an infected animal and touches his or her eyes. Symptoms include irritation and inflammation of the eye and swelling of nearby lymph glands.
 - Oropharyngeal tularemia results from eating or drinking contaminated food or water. Symptoms include sore throat, mouth ulcers, tonsillitis, and swelling of lymph glands in the neck.
 - Pneumonic tularemia results from breathing dusts or aerosols containing the bacteria and is the most serious form. Symptoms include coughing, chest pain, and difficulty breathing.

Diagnosis and Treatment

- Tularemia is a rare disease, and symptoms can be mistaken for other more common illnesses.
- It is important to tell your healthcare provider about exposures to ticks or sick or dead animals.
- Blood tests can help confirm the diagnosis.
- Antibiotics are used to treat tularemia.

To Prevent Tularemia

- Prevent tick bites.
- Use gloves when handling animals, especially rabbits, muskrats, prairie dogs, and other rodents.
- Cook all wild animal meat thoroughly before eating.
- When handling (e.g., skinning or dressing) carcasses of dead animals, wear gloves and wash hands thoroughly immediately after.
- Wash hands thoroughly after working with soil, before and after handling foods, and before eating.

For more information, visit:

- <http://www.cdc.gov/tularemia/>
- <http://www.cdc.gov/ticks/avoid/index.html>