

Tularemia

Cause of Illness

Tularemia is a bacterial disease caused by the bacterium *Francisella tularensis*.

This bacterium has been found in approximately 100 species of wild mammals (rabbits, muskrats, etc.), 9 species of domestic animals (sheep, cattle, cats, etc.), arthropods (ticks, deerflies, and mosquitoes) as well as water and soil contaminated by infected animals. In Colorado, the bacteria are most commonly found in rabbits.

People that have occupational or recreational exposures to these animals, such as rabbit hunters and trappers, are at the greatest risk for tularemia. In addition, laboratory technicians that may work with this bacterium should be very cautious since it is very infectious, especially when aerosolized.

Symptoms

- Abrupt onset of fever, chills, muscle aches, and headache.
- Painful lesion at the site where bacteria entered the body.
- Swollen lymph nodes.

Transmission

Transmission usually occurs from contact with infected rabbits and can also occur after the bite of an infected tick. Exposure can also occur through contaminated water, inadequately cooked meat, or inhalation of aerosolized organisms or contaminated particles.

Rabbit hunters and trappers are at particular risk when exposed to contaminated blood when skinning animals.

Incubation Period

Usually 3-5 days with a range of 1-14.

Prevention and Control

- Wear rubber gloves when handling the carcasses of wild rabbits and other potentially infected animals.
- Wear protective clothing to avoid bites from ticks and other arthropods.
- Use insect repellent when hiking or visiting tick-infested areas.
- Cook game meat thoroughly.

There is no vaccination against tularemia.

Treatment

Treatment for any communicable disease should always be done in consultation with your health care provider.

A 10-day course of antibiotics is the recommended treatment for tularemia.

Antibiotics may be required for a longer period of time for more severe illness.

Resources

www.cdc.gov

Click on "Diseases and Conditions" and select the disease of interest.