

## TULAREMIA

### What is tularemia?

Tularemia is a naturally occurring illness caused by a bacterium called *Francisella tularensis*. These bacteria can be found in certain animals (especially rodents, rabbits and hares). About 100 to 200 cases are reported every year in the United States. Tularemia can cause six different forms of disease; however, up to 80 percent of the cases are “ulceroglandular” (skin ulcers and swollen lymph glands) and are the result of direct contact with infected animals.

### How can someone come into contact with tularemia?

Tularemia is not known to spread from person to person. People can come into contact with tularemia by—

- being bitten by an infected tick, deerfly or other insect;
- handling infected bodies of dead animals;
- eating or drinking contaminated food or water; or
- breathing in the bacteria, *F. tularensis*.

**Tularemia as a weapon:** If the tularemia bacterium is used as a weapon, it most likely would be aerosolized and released into the air. The victims would breathe in the bacteria.

Please note: Just because you come into contact with tularemia does not mean you will get sick from it.

### What happens if someone gets sick from tularemia?

The general effects for tularemia may include fever, chills, muscle pain or tenderness, and lack of energy. There are six main types of tularemia with different effects:

- **Ulceroglandular form:** Patients have a skin ulcer(s) and swollen tender glands.
- **Glandular form:** Patients have swollen glands without a skin ulcer.
- **Oculoglandular form:** Patients have painful, red eyes, often with a yellow discharge and crusting. Swollen glands may occur in the jaw, neck or around the ear.
- **Oropharyngeal form:** From eating undercooked infected meat, this form is associated with a sore throat, stomach pain, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea and occasionally stomach bleeding.
- **Pneumonic form:** From the inhalation of organisms or by spread from other areas of the body, patients with this form have a dry cough, difficulty breathing and sharp chest pain.
- **Typhoidal (septicemic) form:** Bacteria in the bloodstream produces fevers, chills, muscle pain or tenderness, lack of energy and weight loss. The absence of an ulcer or swollen glands can make diagnosis difficult.

People also can catch pneumonia, and develop chest pain and bloody mucus. They can have trouble breathing. They can even stop breathing. Symptoms may gradually worsen from weeks to months after contact with the bacteria.

### How likely is someone to die from tularemia?

Untreated, tularemia has a mortality rate of 5 percent to 15 percent. Appropriate antibiotics can lower this rate to about 1 percent.

(Tularemia continued)

## What is the treatment for tularemia?

Antibiotics are used to treat tularemia.

- **Prevention of illness after contact:** Health care providers can give out antibiotics for up to 14 days.
- **Treatment of illness:** If a person has a tularemia infection and is very sick, he or she may have to stay in the hospital for treatment with antibiotics.

People who are sick from tularemia do not need to be isolated.

## Is there a vaccine for tularemia?

No, a vaccine is not currently available in the United States. A vaccine is under review by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration.

## What should be done if someone comes into contact with tularemia?

If you think that you or someone you know may have come into contact with tularemia bacteria, contact the local county health department right away. (Visit [www.idph.state.il.us//local/alpha.htm](http://www.idph.state.il.us//local/alpha.htm) for a listing of all county health departments in Illinois or check your local phone book.)

If you or someone you know is showing symptoms of tularemia, call your health care provider or the Illinois Poison Center right away. The toll-free number for the poison center is 1-800-222-1222.

## Where can one get more information about tularemia?

- U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention      [www.bt.cdc.gov/agent/tularemia/index.asp](http://www.bt.cdc.gov/agent/tularemia/index.asp)
- Illinois Department of Public Health                      [www.idph.state.il.us](http://www.idph.state.il.us)
- Illinois Poison Center    [www.IllinoisPoisonCenter.org](http://www.IllinoisPoisonCenter.org)