

Tularemia

What is tularemia?

Tularemia is a bacterial disease of both animals and man. Although many wild and domestic animals have been infected, the rabbit is most often involved in disease outbreaks. Oklahoma is one of the states with relatively high rates of disease occurrence.

Who gets tularemia?

People who spend time out of doors are at risk of coming into contact with ticks, infected animals, or an area where an infected animal has died.

How is tularemia spread?

Many routes of human exposure to the tularemia bacteria are possible, although the most common route of transmission in Oklahoma is a bite from an infected tick. Other routes of transmission include contact of the skin or mucous membranes with blood or tissue of infected animals; or handling or eating insufficiently cooked rabbit meat. Less common means of spread are drinking contaminated water; inhaling dust from contaminated soil; or handling contaminated pelts or paws of animals.

What are the symptoms of tularemia?

Following a bite from an infected tick or contamination of a skin wound, the symptoms of Tularemia would be fever, and an ulcerative skin sore, and painful swollen lymph glands. Ingestion of the organism may produce a throat infection, abdominal pain, diarrhea and vomiting. Inhalation of the organism may produce a fever alone or combined with a pneumonia-like illness.

How soon do symptoms appear?

Symptoms appear between 1 and 14 days, but usually after 3-5 days. If a person experiences a fever, or extreme soreness near the site of a tick bite within two weeks of a tick exposure, it is important to contact a physician as soon as possible and tell them about the tick bite.

What is the treatment for tularemia?

Specific antibiotics are prescribed by a physician.

Does past infection with tularemia make a person immune?

Long term immunity will follow recovery from tularemia. However, reinfection has been reported.

What can be done to prevent the spread of tularemia?

Avoid tick exposure, tick bites, and tick infested areas. Minimize any contact pets might have with ticks as well. Rubber gloves should be worn when skinning or handling animals, especially rabbits. Wild rabbit and other game meat should be cooked thoroughly before eating.

How should a tick be removed?

Any tick should be removed as soon as possible. The best way is to use tweezers to grab the tick as close to the skin as possible and pull it straight out. Do not squeeze the tick's body when removing it. Do not handle ticks with bare hands. Wash hands thoroughly after removing a tick. Apply antiseptic to the bite to prevent secondary infections.