

Tularemia

Fact Sheet



Maine Center for Disease
Control and Prevention

An Office of the
Department of Health and Human Services

Paul R. LePage, Governor

Mary C. Mayhew, Commissioner

What is tularemia?

Tularemia is a potentially serious illness that occurs naturally in the United States. It is caused by a bacterium found in animals (especially rodents, rabbits, and hares).

What are the symptoms of tularemia?

Symptoms of tularemia could include: sudden fever, chills, headaches, diarrhea, muscle aches, joint pain, dry cough and progressive weakness.

People can also have pneumonia and develop chest pain, bloody sputum and can have trouble breathing.

Other symptoms of tularemia depend on how a person was exposed to the tularemia bacteria. These symptoms can include ulcers on the skin or mouth, swollen and painful lymph glands, swollen and painful eyes, and a sore throat.

How is tularemia spread?

People can get tularemia many different ways:

- being bitten by an infected tick, deerfly or other insect
- handling infected animal carcasses
- eating or drinking contaminated food or water
- breathing in the bacteria

Tularemia is not known to be spread from person to person. People who have tularemia do not need to be isolated. People who have symptoms and have been exposed to the tularemia bacteria should be treated as soon as possible. The disease can be fatal if it is not treated with the right antibiotics.

Symptoms usually appear 3 to 5 days after exposure to the bacteria, but can take as long as 14 days.

How is tularemia diagnosed?

Tularemia is diagnosed by testing a blood, sputum or skin specimen in the laboratory for the presence of the bacteria.

How is tularemia treated?

Your doctor will most likely prescribe antibiotics, which must be taken according to the directions supplied with your prescription to ensure the best possible result. Let your doctor know if you have any allergy to antibiotics.

How can you prevent tularemia?

Tularemia occurs naturally in many parts of the United States.

- Use insect repellent containing DEET on your skin, or treat clothing with repellent containing permethrin to prevent insect bites.
- Wash your hands often, using soap and warm water, especially after handling animal carcasses.
- Be sure to cook your food thoroughly and assure that your water is from a safe source.
- Hunters and trappers should wear gloves when handling animals.

Where can I get more information?

For more information contact your healthcare provider or local health center. You can also contact the Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention by calling 1-800-821-5821 or visiting the website <http://www.mainepublichealth.gov>. The federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website - <http://www.cdc.gov> - is another excellent source of information.