

Tularemia

Definition:

Tularemia is a potentially serious illness that is caused by the bacterium *Francisella tularensis*, a gram negative coccobacillus. The reservoir for *F. tularensis* is wild animals, most commonly rabbits, hares, voles, muskrats, beavers, some domestic animals and ticks. Because *F. tularensis* can be airborne and weaponized, it is considered a potential bioterrorism agent.

Signs and symptoms:

Most cases will present with sudden fever, chills, fatigue, myalgia, nausea, and headache. Illness often conforms to one of several syndromes depending on how an individual is exposed. The most common of these syndromes are ulceroglandular and glandular. A bioterrorist event would likely manifest as pneumonic.

Transmission:

Typically, transmission occurs through the bite of an infected arthropod (tick, deerfly, or mosquito), ingestion of contaminated water or food, handling infected carcasses, or inhalation of airborne bacteria in dust from contaminated soil. Tularemia is also known as “rabbit fever” or “deer fly fever”. There have been documented laboratory infections. There is no direct person-to-person transmission.

Diagnosis:

Tularemia is diagnosed by clinical symptoms and laboratory tests.

Role of the School Nurse:

Prevention

- Educate students and staff about risks associated with insect bites, ingesting contaminated food or water, and handling animal carcasses
- Encourage the use of insect repellent containing DEET on skin or permethrin on clothing to prevent insect bites
- Encourage frequent hand washing, especially after contact with animal carcasses
- Encourage cooking food thoroughly and drinking water from a safe source
- Encourage appropriate use of protective equipment (i.e. rubber gloves) when hunting or in contact with animal blood or secretions

Treatment Recommendations

- If symptoms are noted, the child should see a provider for testing and treatment
- Antibiotic treatment is available.

Exclusions

- Children who are sick should remain at home and see a provider if the disease is suspected

Reporting Requirements

- Tularemia is reportable immediately by phone (1-800-821-5821) upon recognition or strong suspicion of illness

Resources:



- Maine CDC Tularemia website: <http://www.maine.gov/dhhs/mecdc/infectious-disease/epi/disease/tularemia.shtml>
- Federal CDC Tularemia website: <http://www.cdc.gov/Tularemia/>