



Tularemia Fact Sheet

What Is Tularemia?

Tularemia is an infectious disease caused by a hardy bacterium, *Francisella tularensis*, found in animals (especially rodents, rabbits, and hares).

How Do You Get It?

It is a widespread disease of animals. About 200 cases of tularemia in humans are reported each year in the U.S., mostly in people living in the south-central and western states. Nearly all cases occur in rural areas and are linked with the bites of infective ticks and biting flies; with the handling of infected rodents, rabbits, or hares; or by drinking contaminated water. Cases can result from inhaling infectious aerosols and from laboratory accidents.

People have not been known to transmit the infection to others, so infected people do not need to be isolated.

How Dangerous Is Tularemia?

The disease can be fatal (40% for people with the lung and systemic type of disease) if it is not treated with the right antibiotics. The disease is highly infectious: a small number of bacteria (10-50 organisms) can cause disease. *F. tularensis* can remain alive for weeks in water and soil.

If *F. tularensis* were used as a bioweapon, the bacteria would likely be made airborne to breathe in. People who inhale an infectious aerosol would most likely have severe breathing problems, including life-threatening pneumonia and systemic infection, if they were not treated. The bacteria that cause tularemia occur widely in nature and could be isolated and grown in a large number in a lab, although making an aerosol weapon that works would be a big challenge.

What Are the Symptoms?

Based on the way a person gets the disease, its bacteria may cause skin ulcers, swollen and painful lymph glands, inflamed eyes, sore throat, oral ulcers, or pneumonia. If the bacteria were inhaled, symptoms would include the abrupt onset of fever, chills, headache, muscle aches, joint pain, dry cough, and weakness that worsens. Persons with pneumonia can develop chest pain, difficulty breathing, bloody sputum, and trouble breathing or even breathing failure.

How Soon Do Infected People Get Sick?

The incubation period for tularemia is around 3 to 5 days, with a range of 1 to 14 days.



How Is Tularemia Treated?

People who have been exposed to *F. tularensis* should be treated as soon as possible with antibiotics.

Can Tularemia Be Prevented?

In the past, a vaccine for tularemia has been used to protect lab workers, but it is under review now by the Food and Drug Administration.

Tularemia is not known to spread from person to person, so people who have tularemia do not need to be isolated.

What Should I Do if I Think I *Have* Tularemia?

If you are showing symptoms of tularemia, call your health care provider right away.

What Should I Do if I Think I Have Been *Exposed* to Tularemia?

Seek prompt medical attention. If a person has been exposed to the disease, a physician will recommend treatment.

Local and state health departments should be notified right away so investigation and control can begin. If the exposure is thought to be due to bioterrorism, local and state health departments will notify CDC, the FBI, and other appropriate authorities.

Excerpted from the CDC website: <http://www.bt.cdc.gov/agent/tularemia/index.asp>