



## Can domestic animals get tularemia?

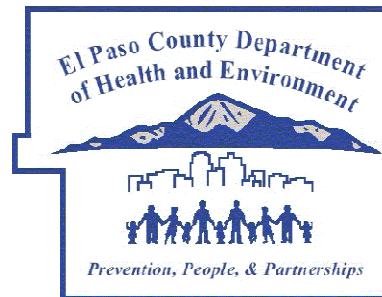
**Yes.** Pets—including cats and dogs—can contract the disease, along with domestic birds and rabbits. Dogs usually are not seriously affected by tularemia but may show mild symptoms such as loss of appetite, low fever and exhaustion.

Cats are more vulnerable than dogs and may develop sores at the site of infection, high fever and swollen lymph nodes. As the disease progresses, a rash may occur with a discharge from the eyes and nose.

To safeguard your pet against tularemia, use flea and tick collars. Consult with your veterinarian for other prevention tips. The best precaution against exposure is to keep pets away from wild animals, living or dead.

## How can I prevent exposure to tularemia?

- Use water-resistant gloves, eyewear and masks when skinning or handling animals, especially rabbits.
- Wear insect repellent containing DEET and protective clothing while hiking, hunting or camping in wooded areas.
- Check yourself for ticks after recreating in wooded areas.
- Cook wild game meat to a uniform internal temperature of 165 degrees before eating.



This pamphlet was produced by the  
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12/08

# Facts about Tularemia

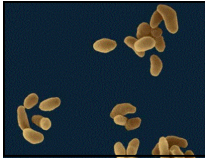


**El Paso County  
Department of Health  
and Environment**

*“Protecting and Promoting Public  
Health and Environmental Quality  
in the Community through People,  
Prevention & Partnerships”*

## What is tularemia?

Tularemia, also known as “rabbit fever,” is a disease caused by the bacterium *Francisella tularensis*. This bacterium can remain alive for weeks in water and soil. Tularemia typically is spread by ticks, biting flies and infected animals such as rodents, rabbits and hares. Cases of tularemia have been reported in every U.S. state except Hawaii.



Tularemia Bacteria

## Historical significance

There is evidence that *Francisella tularensis* may have emerged in the United States as early as the 1800s. In the early 1900s, a Japanese physician, Hachiro Ohara, linked the disease with individuals who hunted and/or ate rabbit. The Japanese later adopted the name “Yato-Byo,” translated rabbit fever.

In January 2005, the Colorado State Health Department began pairing tularemia and plague tests due to their similar symptoms. At present, every specimen submitted for plague testing is screened for tularemia.

## Is tularemia common in the United States?

**Yes.** Tularemia is a widespread disease in animals. Also, about 200 human cases of tularemia are reported each year nationwide.

Most cases of tularemia occur in the South Central and Western United States—mainly in rural areas but sometimes in mountainous regions.

## What are the symptoms?

Symptoms of tularemia include:

- \* Sudden fever (100.4—104 degrees F)
- \* Chills
- \* Headaches
- \* Muscle aches
- \* Progressive weakness
- \* Dry cough
- \* Joint pain
- \* Pneumonia

People who develop pneumonia may experience chest pains and might have trouble breathing.

Other symptoms of tularemia can include ulcers on the skin or mouth, swollen and painful lymph glands, swollen and aching eyes, and a sore throat.

## What is the incubation period?

The incubation period (time from exposure to first symptoms) can range from 1-14 days but averages 3-5 days.

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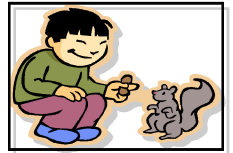
## Is there a vaccine for tularemia?

No vaccine exists at this time, but treatments involving antibiotics have proven very effective.

## Do I need treatment if I have been exposed?

If you think you have been exposed to the tularemia bacteria, see a physician immediately. A medication treatment might be recommended, such as an antibiotic.

If you are prescribed antibiotics, it is very important that you carefully follow the instructions. All medications must be taken as instructed in order to be effective.



## What are the main risk factors for humans?

Most infections occur when people ...

- are bitten by infected insects (most commonly ticks and deerflies);
- handle sick or dead animals;
- eat undercooked wild game meat (rabbit, squirrel, hare); or
- drink contaminated water from an outdoor source or inhale the bacteria in the air.