

T U L A R E M I A

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 people become infected with the tularemia bacteria?

- Typically, persons become infected through the bites most commonly, ticks and deerflies that have fed on an infected animal.
- By handling infected animal carcasses.
- By eating or drinking contaminated food or water, or by inhaling infected aerosols.

What are the signs and symptoms of tularemia?

- Depending on the route of exposure, the tularemia bacteria may cause: skin ulcers, swollen and painful lymph glands, inflamed eyes, and sore throat, oral ulcers or pneumonia.
- Early symptoms almost always include the abrupt onset of fever, chills, headache, muscle aches, joint pain, dry cough, and progressive weakness. Persons with pneumonia can develop chest pain, difficulty breathing, bloody sputum and respiratory failure.

What should someone do if they suspect they or others have been exposed to the tularemia bacteria?

- Seek prompt medical attention.
- If a person has been exposed to *Francisella tularensis*, treatment with antibiotics for 10-14 days or more after exposure may be recommended.

How is tularemia diagnosed?

When tularemia is clinically suspected, the healthcare worker will collect specimens, such as blood or sputum, from the patient for testing in a diagnostic or reference laboratory.

Preliminary identification may take less than 2 hours, but confirmatory testing will take longer, usually 24 to 48 hours but sometimes a week or more.

Can tularemia be effectively treated with antibiotics?

Yes. After potential exposure or diagnosis, early treatment is recommended with an antibiotic from the tetracycline (such as doxycycline) or fluoroquinolone (such as ciprofloxacin).