

**Basic Fact Sheet – Tularemia in Animals**  
**Texas Department of Health, Zoonosis Control Division**

**What is tularemia?**

Tularemia is an infection caused by bacteria (*Francisella tularensis*). It can affect more than 250 kinds of wild and domestic mammals, birds, reptiles, and fish as well as humans.

**How can an animal get tularemia?**

Tularemia can be transmitted (spread) naturally by eating or touching infected tissues, by breathing infected material, or by the bite of infected insects. Ticks are the most frequently reported sources of human infection in the US, followed by contact with infected rabbits.

**What are the signs of tularemia?**

Animals that are naturally infected through the bite of a tick or by eating infected tissue may take as long as 10 days to become ill. Inhaling (breathing in) the bacteria will result in sudden fever, tiredness, loss of appetite, and a cough. Without treatment, death may occur within a few hours to a few days depending on how much was inhaled.

**How is tularemia diagnosed?**

Diagnosis of this disease is generally very difficult because of unclear signs. Laboratory testing is available, but it is difficult to perform.

**How is tularemia treated?**

Antibiotics usually can reduce the severity of the illness.

**Is a tularemia vaccine available?**

There is no vaccine available for animals. There is an investigational new drug for humans.

**Can infected animals spread tularemia?**

Yes. Spread of the disease is usually by the bite of insects (such as ticks) or by handling or eating an animal that died of tularemia. For example, hunters can be exposed while handling recently killed game, such as rabbits.

**What is done with animals that die of tularemia?**

There are no special burial or disposal requirements.

**How can I protect my animals and myself?**

Control ticks and other parasites to prevent spread of the disease to other animals and humans. Infected animals do not have to be isolated (separated), but all people handling them should wear gloves. Disinfect areas in contact with the infected animals with a mixture of one part household bleach (0.5% hypochlorite) in nine parts water. Apply to all surfaces and wash off with water after waiting at least 30 minutes.