



South Central Public Health District

Prevent. Promote. Protect.

1020 Washington Street N • Twin Falls, ID 83301
(208) 737-5900

TULAREMIA AS A BIOTERRORISM EVENT

What is tularemia?

The bacteria (germs) that cause tularemia are normally spread to humans by contact with dead, infected animals (rabbits, squirrels, and birds), by flea and tick bites, and by breathing dust or soil that has been contaminated by infected animals. The infection can also be transmitted by drinking contaminated water or by eating undercooked meat. If the bacteria were intentionally released into the air, it could be inhaled into your lungs and cause an infection such as pneumonia.

Can tularemia be spread from person-to-person?

The infection is not spread from person-to-person.

How will I know if I was exposed to the bacteria?

It will depend on how the bacteria were released, where the bacteria were released, and where you were in relation to the release site. The further away you are from the release site, the less likely it will be that you are exposed.

How soon will symptoms develop (incubation period)?

Normally the symptoms start 3 to 5 days after exposure to the bacteria, but the incubation period may be as short as 1 day or as long as 21 days depending on how close you were to the site where the bacteria were released into the air. Not all persons exposed to the bacteria will develop symptoms.

What are the symptoms of infection?

The symptoms of tularemia are generally flu-like and may include a sudden onset of fever, chills, headache, tiredness, sore muscles, loss of appetite, cough, and chest pain. You may also develop a sore throat with painful, swollen glands or an ulcer on your face, neck, or arms with painful, swollen glands.

How is the infection treated?

If you have symptoms of the infection, your health care provider will give you an antibiotic.

How is the infection prevented?

If it is determined that you were exposed to the bacteria that cause tularemia, you will be offered an antibiotic. Even if you take the antibiotic, you may still develop the infection. If you have any of the symptoms described previously, you should see your health care provider immediately.

How long should I take the antibiotic?

It is important that you take the antibiotic exactly as directed. The dose and number of days will differ depending on the antibiotic prescribed. If you develop side effects (reaction) to the antibiotic, call your health care provider immediately. Do not give your antibiotic to another person.

Where can I get more information on tularemia?

For more information on tularemia, call South Central Public Health District at 737-5900.