

Tularemia

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Tularemia is a disease of man and animals, sometimes known as rabbit fever or deerfly fever, caused by the bacteria *Francisella tularensis*. Tularemia in humans is highly variable depending on the route of infection, the infecting dose and the subspecies of organism involved.¹ After an incubation period of about 3 days most cases have a sudden onset of flu-like symptoms (headache, fever, prostration, and generalized aching) accompanied by vomiting and diarrhea. The most commonly recognized form of the disease is a slowly healing ulcer with regional lymphnode involvement, although an exanthum, while infrequent, can occur on the upperbody, face, neck and limbs and persist for several weeks.² Other less common forms include oculoglandular when contaminated material gets into the eyes, pneumonic from inhaling infectious dust, and typhoidal, gastrointestinal and oral pharyngeal caused by ingesting *F. tularensis*.

Rabbits and rodents are most susceptible to tularemia and serve as a source of infection for humans, although the disease has also been reported in domestic livestock, dogs and cats.² People usually contract the disease by 1) handling or cleaning an infected rabbit or 2) the bite of a tick or deerfly. However, cases have been reported where cats transmitted the disease to their owners via a bite or scratch after they had eaten or mouthed infected animals.³

Florida's first case of tularemia was reported in 1924 and during the next one-half century 247 cases were reported.⁴ These were reported from all areas of the state throughout the year with over half (56%) occurring between November and March. Information on race sex and exposure on this cohort was incomplete. Still, available records showed the majority of cases to be mostly white (74%), male (66%) and between the ages of 30 and 49 (68%). The number of tularemia cases reported dropped of dramatically by the early 1960's and the trend continued during the next two decades (1975-84 = 7 cases and 1985-94 = 3 cases). No cases were reported in 1995 and the disease was removed from the state list of notifiable diseases in 1996.

References

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