

# FactSheet

Para Su Información

## Tularemia

### What is tularemia?

Tularemia is an illness caused by a bacterium, *Francisella tularensis*, which can affect both animals and humans. *F. tularensis* is on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) list of possible bioterrorism agents.

### How is tularemia spread?

The most common way tularemia is spread is by the bite of an infected blood-sucking insect such as a deerfly or tick.

Another way people become infected with tularemia is by getting blood or tissue from infected animals (especially rabbits) in their eyes, mouth, or in cuts or scratches on the skin. Tularemia can also be spread by handling or eating rabbit meat that is not cooked thoroughly.

Drinking contaminated water or breathing dust containing the bacteria can cause a tularemia infection.

Person to person spread does not occur. In a biological attack, tularemia would be spread through an aerosol release of the bacteria.

### What are the symptoms of tularemia?

The usual symptoms are fever, chills, headache, muscle aches, chest pain and coughing.

If a person is infected with tularemia by the bite of an infected insect or from bacteria entering a cut or scratch, a skin ulcer and swollen glands may occur.

Eating or drinking food or water containing the bacteria may produce: sore throat, stomach pain, diarrhea and vomiting. Breathing dust containing the bacteria may cause a pneumonia-like illness.

### Is there a treatment for tularemia?

Doctors can prescribe antibiotics for tularemia. To be effective, treatment should be started early. If left untreated, the disease can be fatal.

### Is there a vaccine for tularemia?

A tularemia vaccine is currently under investigation, but is not available to the general public.

### Should I buy a gas mask?

Purchasing a gas mask is not currently recommended for the following reasons:

- If an attack occurs, the types of agents and concentrations are unknown and therefore it is almost impossible to accurately select a mask.
- Gas masks may reduce, but do not eliminate exposure to chemical or biological agents. They do not eliminate the risk of infection.
- There may be no obvious warning in the event of a biological or chemical attack, so you would not be able to determine when to put the mask on.
- Gas masks may help protect your lungs, however, some chemical agents may be absorbed through the skin or eyes.
- Negative pressure masks can be dangerous for children or people with respiratory problems.

### Should I have my own supply of antibiotics?

There is currently no justification for stockpiling antibiotics. Antibiotics could cause side effects and should only be taken with medical supervision.

There are a number of different germs a bioterrorist might use to carry out an attack. Many antibiotics are effective for a variety of diseases, but there isn't one antibiotic that is effective against all diseases.

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Thus, no single pill can protect against all types of biological weapon attacks.

Keeping a supply of antibiotics on hand poses other problems because the antibiotics have a limited “shelf life” before they lose their strength.

### **Where can I get more information?**

Additional information about tularemia can be found on the CDC’s website at [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov).



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