

Tularemia



- Tularemia is a fatal bacterial disease of rabbits and rodents that can spread to humans and other species.

Species Affected in Colorado

- Rabbits, hares
- Beavers, other rodents
- Less commonly, other species including domestic animals and humans.

What to Look For

- Multiple sick or dead rabbits or rodents (including beavers)
- Pinpoint white spots throughout the liver and spleen, not to be confused with tapeworm tracks in the liver (see CPW rabbit tapeworm fact sheet)



In some cases of tularemia, hunters may observe pinpoint white spots throughout the liver.

Cause and Transmission

Tularemia is caused by the bacteria *Francisella tularensis*. Infection with this type of bacteria is fatal in species including rabbits, beavers, squirrels, and other rodents. Infection is usually transmitted through ticks, biting flies, and fleas. Wild carnivores and pets can become infected by eating infected carcasses, and any species can be infected through tick, fly, and flea bites. Hunters and trappers may be infected when skinning carcasses, handling tissues, or consuming tissues from an infected animal. Less commonly, infection can occur by ingesting food or water that has been contaminated with animal wastes or infected carcasses. Infection may occur from breathing aerosolized bacteria, as could happen when mowing over dead rabbit or rodent carcasses.

Public Health Considerations

Tularemia can infect humans and domestic animals, and infections can be fatal if not detected and treated promptly. To prevent infection, avoid ticks, flies and fleas by wearing long clothing and insect repellents, and using flea and tick preventatives for your pets. Do not allow pets to consume carcasses. Do not handle sick or injured wildlife. When hunting, do not skin or consume animals that you observe to be sick or dead. When field dressing carcasses, protect yourself from contact with tissues, fluids, and parasites (i.e., ticks, fleas). Contact your physician immediately if you feel ill or develop skin lesions following contact with wild animals, ticks, fleas, or other biting insects.

Additional Information/References:

Tularemia; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: <http://www.cdc.gov/Tularemia/>
 Tularemia; Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment:
<https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/cdphe/tularemia>

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