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Fax From: Hunterdon County Everbridge System

Subject: LINCS MESSAGE: Public Health Info

Tularemia prevention

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**This message is intended for Health Officers, local health department staff, animal control officers, and health care professionals.**

**The New Jersey Department of Health (NJDOH) would like to remind public health and health care professionals of prevention measures to protect individuals from the tick-associated illness tularemia.**

Tularemia, also known as "rabbit fever," is a rare, potentially serious illness caused by the bacterium *Francisella tularensis*, which occurs widely in nature and can affect animals, particularly rodents and rabbits. Tularemia can be acquired in multiple ways, such as being bitten by an infected tick or deer fly, handling infected animal carcasses; eating or drinking contaminated food or water; or inhaling the bacteria.

The clinical manifestations of tularemia vary in severity and presentation according to route of introduction and virulence of the agent. The onset of disease is typically sudden and influenza-like, with high fever (up to 104°F), chills, fatigue, general body aches, headache, and nausea. Most often, tularemia presents with large, tender lymph nodes and a non-healing skin ulcer at the site of introduction of the bacteria (ulceroglandular type). This form typically arises from handling a contaminated carcass or following an infective tick bite.

The American dog tick and the Lone Star tick, both found locally are known to carry tularemia.

**Prevention:**

Several precautions can protect individuals from tularemia.

- Avoid drinking, bathing, swimming or working in untreated water where infection may be common among wild animals.
- Do not handle sick or dead animals
- Use impervious gloves when skinning or handling animals, especially rabbits.
- Cook the meat of wild rabbits and rodents thoroughly.
- Wear light-colored, tightly woven clothing to make it easier to spot ticks; tuck shirts into pants and pants into socks; wear closed shoes/sneakers rather than open sandals.
- Use a tick repellent as directed. Products should contain DEET (for clothing OR skin) or Permethrin (for clothing ONLY). Remind children to ask an adult to apply the tick repellent and DO NOT apply to hands or face. Use products containing 20% to 30% DEET, picaridin or IR3535 and always follow manufacturer's directions carefully. For detailed information about using DEET on children, see recommendations from the American Academy of Pediatrics ([www.aap.org](http://www.aap.org)).
- While outside, stay in the center of trails; avoid low bushes and leafy brush; periodically check clothing and skin for ticks and remove.
- Once inside, check clothing, skin, and hair for ticks (take special note of navel, underarm, groin area and behind the ears). If a tick is found, remove it carefully with tweezers.
- Prevent pets from free-roaming

Following these precautions will not only decrease one's risk of tularemia, but also that of other tick-borne diseases, such as Lyme disease, Ehrlichiosis, Babesiosis and Rocky Mountain spotted fever.

#### Reservoirs:

Tularemia has a wide host range, but the infection naturally circulates among wild vertebrate reservoirs (predominantly rabbits and rodents). Sheep, horses, pigs, dogs and cats are the domestic animals most commonly affected. Susceptibility to *F. tularensis* varies based on species of animal. Rodents and rabbits generally suffer a fatal septicemic disease and are sometimes found dead in clusters. Cats and dogs are thought to become infected after hunting or consuming dead rodents or lagomorphs and may show signs of septicemia (e.g., fever, anorexia, weakness, lymphadenopathy and depression) or be asymptomatic. Infection in dogs is usually mild or inapparent. The usual interval between exposure and onset of illness ranges from 1 to 14 days. Ticks are the biological vectors, although other hematophagous arthropods (e.g., biting flies and mosquitoes) can also serve as vectors. *F. tularensis* can survive for long periods of time in vector populations, in the carcasses and hides of infected animals, and in fomites (e.g., dust, grain, straw, and soil).

#### Reminders:

NJDOH reminds health care providers to take thorough occupational and travel histories and to assess for animal or tick-bite exposures when evaluating patients with febrile illnesses. Also, health care providers should consider tularemia in differential diagnoses of patients with clinically compatible illnesses and risk factors. Health care providers suspecting tularemia are advised to inform laboratory staff when submitting diagnostic specimens to laboratories.

Suspected or diagnosed cases in domestic companion animals (i.e., pets) and humans should be reported to the local health department with jurisdiction or the NJDOH at (609) 826-4872; cases in livestock species should be reported to the New Jersey Department of Agriculture at (609) 671-6400; and cases in wildlife (i.e. wild rabbits) should be reported to the New Jersey

For more information about tularemia or tick bite prevention, please contact your local health department, New Jersey Department of Health at 609-826-4872 or visit NJDOH website at [www.nj.gov/health/cd/tularemia/](http://www.nj.gov/health/cd/tularemia/). Additional information is available on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website at [www.cdc.gov/tularemia](http://www.cdc.gov/tularemia) and [www.cdc.gov/features/stopticks/](http://www.cdc.gov/features/stopticks/).