

NEWS RELEASE | **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE** | August 13, 2019

Simple precautions can prevent tularemia

BISMARCK, N.D. – A rabbit found in Sheridan County tested positive for *Francisella tularensis*, the bacteria that causes the zoonotic disease, tularemia. The disease can be transmitted through direct contact with blood or tissue of infected animals, inhalation of contaminated dust or aerosols, ingestion of contaminated food or water, and through the bites of infected ticks and deer flies. Humans and domestic animals are susceptible to tularemia, which can be life-threatening if untreated.

“Symptoms of tularemia in humans vary depending on how the infection was acquired and generally appear one to 14 days after exposure,” said Laura Cronquist, an epidemiologist with the North Dakota Department of Health (NDDoH). “Symptoms may include sudden onset of fever, chills, headaches, muscle aches, joint pain, diarrhea, progressive weakness, and dry cough. Other symptoms can include skin ulcers, eye irritation, swollen lymph nodes, chest pain, and difficulty breathing.” Most people diagnosed with tularemia fully recover following proper antibiotic treatment. Four human cases of tularemia have been reported to the NDDoH in 2019.

The NDDoH recommends using Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)-registered insect repellents containing DEET, picaridin, IR3535, Oil of Lemon Eucalyptus (OLE), para-menthane-diol (PMD), or 2-undecanone when outdoors to prevent bites from ticks and insects that can spread tularemia and other diseases. Wearing long pants, long-sleeved shirts, and socks can also help keep ticks and insects away from skin. Since the bacteria that causes tularemia can be aerosolized, the NDDoH warns people against mowing over dead animals. Other ways to prevent tularemia include thoroughly cooking game meat and avoiding ingestion of untreated water.

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department advises that people avoid direct contact with sick or dead animals. If disposing of carcasses becomes necessary, gloves should be used and hands should be thoroughly washed.

Tularemia occurs sporadically in rabbits and rodents in North Dakota. In this case, a domestic cat that had contact with a rabbit’s carcass was presumed positive for tularemia based on clinical signs of illness. The cat is responding well to appropriate treatment under the care of a veterinarian at Sheridan Animal Hospital.

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