

## For Colorado Veterinarians: Questions & Answers about Tularemia



**COLORADO**  
Department of Public  
Health & Environment

### As a veterinarian am I at risk of contracting tularemia?

Yes. If your patient presents with fever and/or lymphadenopathy, take precautions to protect yourself and your staff. The greatest risk occurs during necropsy when tissues are handled or from activities that potentially aerosolize environmentally persistent *F. tularensis*. You may also be at risk if you are bitten by a domestic animal that has the bacterium in its mouth.

### What should I do if I or my staff are exposed to tularemia?

If you or your staff had high risk exposure to an infected animal, you should speak to your primary care physician about prophylactic antibiotics. High risk contact would include direct contact with patient tissues or being bitten by an infected patient.

### Who do I contact to report a case of tularemia or to seek further assistance?

Please contact CDPHE at 303-692-2700 and ask to speak to someone regarding tularemia.

### What should I do if I suspect a pet owner has been exposed to tularemia?

Your client should contact their primary care physician and notify them that they may have been exposed to tularemia. Additionally, the local (county) health department where the client lives should be contacted, or CDPHE.

### What precautions should I tell pet owners to take to protect themselves from contracting tularemia?

Your clients should be instructed to keep their pets' flea and tick medication up to date, and limit pets' outdoor unsupervised roaming to decrease potential interactions with rodents and rabbits. If your client notices a rabbit or rodent die-off or disappearance on their property, they should contact the environmental health staff at their local county health department. If they think a die-off has occurred, clients should avoid mowing the lawn or engaging in other activities that

may aerosolize potentially contaminated debris on the property.

### What should I do if one of my patients is healthy but recently caught and/or ate a small mammal such as a rabbit?

Instruct the client to keep the pet on fever and symptom watch for 10-14 days. If the pet becomes febrile, the client should bring the animal to you for treatment and diagnosis.

### If I suspect my patient has tularemia, where can I send specimens to be tested?

Colorado State University Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratories (CSU VDL). Submission guidance and forms can be found at <http://www.dlab.colostate.edu>

The Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment Laboratory (CDPHE). Laboratory information may be found at <http://www.colorado.gov/cs/Satellite/CDPHE-Lab/CBON/1251583470522>.

### What is the treatment for Tularemia?

Diagnostic specimens should be collected before you begin antibiotic therapy. Treatment should start immediately after this, do not wait for laboratory confirmation. Early treatment can prevent death of the animal. Preferred antibiotics are streptomycin, gentamicin, tetracyclines or chloramphenicol. Duration of treatment varies depending on the antibiotic used and the severity of illness.

### References

1. Feldman KA. 2003. Tularemia. JAVMA. 22(6): 725-30.
2. The Merck Veterinary Manual. Overview of Tularemia. [www.merckmanuals.com/vet/generalized\\_conditions/tularemia/overview\\_of\\_tularemia.html](http://www.merckmanuals.com/vet/generalized_conditions/tularemia/overview_of_tularemia.html)