

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Death Reported in a Rabbit in Douglas County, IL, Tularemia Identified

Death Reported in a Rabbit in Tuscola, IL, Tularemia Identified

Douglas County Health Department Urges Residents to Be Aware of Tularemia Symptoms and Health Precautions

TUSCOLA, IL – The Douglas County Health Department (DCHD) is encouraging area residents to be aware of tularemia symptoms and to monitor their families and pets for signs of illness. Several cases of illness and death in squirrels found in Urbana have been reported, and one of the squirrels tested positive for tularemia, a rare but serious disease that can affect both humans and animals. The presence of infected wildlife may indicate an increased risk of exposure in the area.

Tularemia is caused by the bacterium *Francisella tularensis*, which is commonly found in animals, especially rodents, rabbits, and hares. Wild animals can carry the bacterium and often die from infection. Humans and many domestic animals, including dogs and cats, can also become infected.

Pets may become infected through contact with or consumption of infected animals, such as rabbits or rodents. They can also be exposed through tick or flea bites, or by inhaling or ingesting contaminated materials. Pet owners should watch for signs of illness in their animals and consult a veterinarian if they have concerns.

People infected with tularemia may develop skin ulcers, swollen lymph nodes, a sudden fever, chills, headache, diarrhea, joint pain, muscle aches, cough, and weakness. Infection can occur through handling infected pets or wild animals, or from tick bites. It can also happen through inhalation, particularly during farming or landscaping activities when machinery—such as tractors or mowers—runs over infected animals or carcasses. If you develop symptoms of tularemia, contact your health care provider promptly.

To reduce the chance of pets becoming infected:

Do not allow cats or dogs to hunt or roam outdoors unsupervised.

Consult your veterinarian to ensure pets are protected from tick bites.

Report any unexplained large die-offs of rodents or rabbits to your local animal control agency.

To reduce the chance of human infection:

Wear tick protection, such as insect repellent and long clothing, when outdoors.

Avoid mowing over sick or dead animals.

Do not handle wild animals.

Take any pet showing symptoms of tularemia to a veterinarian promptly. If you have questions about tularemia in animals, please contact your veterinarian.

If you have questions about tularemia in humans, please contact your health care provider.

For additional information: <https://dph.illinois.gov/topics-services/emergency-preparedness-response/public-health-care-system-preparedness/tularemia.html> or <https://www.cdc.gov/tularemia/site.html>