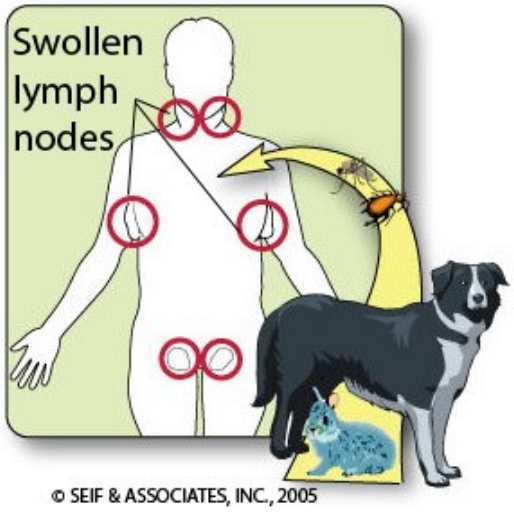
Tularemia (Rabbit Fever), General Information

The Rocky Mountain wood tick, the American dog tick, and the Lone Star tick carry *tularemia*, a *bacterium* (germ). Ticks feed on infected mice, rabbits, and other animals. The infected ticks give the infection to the animals they feed on. Infected females can pass the infection to their eggs. Other blood-sucking insects, such as horse flies, deer flies, and mosquitoes also carry the disease.



SYMPTOMS

Symptoms of Tularemia include chills and fever, loss of appetite, weakness, swollen lymph nodes, and an ulcer-like wound at the site of the tick bite. Symptoms become more severe if the disease is not diagnosed and treated with *antibiotics*. These are medications that kill germs. The disease can be diagnosed by identifying the bacterium and by specific blood tests. There are a few deaths each year.

PREVENTION AND CONTROL

Ticks prefer to hide in shady, moist ground litter, but can often be found above the ground clinging to tall grass, brush, shrubs, and low tree branches. They also inhabit lawns and gardens, especially at the edges of woodlands and around old stone walls. Within the native ranges of the germ carried by the ticks and other insects known to cause tularemia, no natural vegetated area can be considered completely free of infected ticks.

In tick-infested areas, avoid contact with soil, leaf litter, and vegetation as much as possible. Clearing brush and mowing tall grass around houses and at the edges of gardens may help reduce the tick population in the immediate area. Spring (late May) and Fall (September) applications of chemical insecticides by a licensed professional will also control ticks, especially in heavily infested areas. When working in the garden, pruning shrubs, or handling soil and vegetation, wear light-colored protective clothing and gloves. Spot-check often to prevent ticks from reaching the skin.

Ticks cannot jump or fly. They will not drop from an above-ground perch onto a passing animal. Potential hosts (e.g. humans) acquire ticks only by direct contact with them. Once a tick gains access to human skin, it generally climbs upward until it reaches a more protected area. This is often the back of the knee, groin, navel, armpit, ears, or nape of the neck. It then begins the slow process of embedding itself in the skin. This is when the human becomes infected.

Campers, hikers, field workers, and others who spend time in wooded, brushy, or tall grassy areas can avoid exposure to ticks by using the following precautions:

- Wear light-colored clothing with a tight weave to spot ticks more easily and prevent contact with the skin.
- Wear long pants tucked into socks, long-sleeved shirts tucked into pants, and enclosed shoes or boots in conjunction with insect repellent. Insect repellent helps because other blood sucking insects such as horse flies, deer flies, and mosquitoes can carry the disease.
- Spray clothes with insect repellent containing either DEET or Permethrin. Only Deet can be used on exposed skin, but never in high concentrations. Make sure to follow the manufacturer's directions carefully.
- Wear a hat and keep long hair pulled back.
- Stay on cleared, well-worn trails whenever possible.
- Spot-check yourself and others frequently for the presence of ticks on clothes. If you find one, there are likely to be others. Check thoroughly.
- Remove clothes after leaving tick-infested areas. If possible, wash them to eliminate any unseen ticks. Check yourself, your children, and any pets from head to toe for the presence of ticks.
- Shower and shampoo.

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