What is tularemia?
Tularemia, also known as “rabbit fever,” is a disease caused by the bacterium *Francisella tularensis*. Tularemia is typically found in wild animals, especially rodents, rabbits, and hares. Humans and domestic animals such as cats and sheep can also acquire it.

About 200 human cases of tularemia are reported each year in the United States. Most cases occur in the south-central and western states. Ohio averages less than one case per year.

How is tularemia spread?
Typically, people become infected through the bite of infected insects (most commonly, ticks and deerflies), by handling infected sick or dead animals, by eating or drinking contaminated food or water, or by inhaling airborne bacteria. Since very few bacteria are needed to cause an infection and they are able to survive in the environment for weeks, tularemia is a viewed as a potential bioweapon. Tularemia cannot be spread from one person to another.

Who is at risk for getting tularemia?
Hunters, trappers, hikers, campers and others who spend a great deal of time outdoors and are exposed to tick and deer fly bites or handle wild animals are at risk.

How long after exposure before symptoms appear?
Symptoms may appear 2-10 days after exposure, but are generally evident after 3 days.

What are the symptoms of tularemia?
Tularemia is usually recognized by the presence of skin lesions and swollen glands. Ingestion of the organism may produce a sore throat, intestinal pain, diarrhea and vomiting. Inhalation of the organism may produce a fever alone or in combination with a pneumonia-like illness. Tularemia can be fatal if the person is not treated with appropriate antibiotics.

How is tularemia diagnosed?
Samples of blood or saliva can be tested in a laboratory. Preliminary results are available in a few hours, but confirmation may take a few days.

How is tularemia treated?
Antibiotic treatment is recommended whenever it is likely a person was exposed or has been diagnosed with tularemia. Several antibiotics are effective including gentamycin and tetracyclines.

Is there a vaccine available for tularemia?
A vaccine was used in the past to protect laboratory workers, but it is no longer available.

What can be done to prevent tularemia?
- Rubber gloves should be worn when skinning or handling animals, especially rabbits.
- Wild rabbit and rodent meat should be cooked thoroughly before eating.
- Avoid bites of flies and ticks and avoid bathing, swimming, or working in untreated water where infection might prevail among wild animals.

For more information visit these websites.