

BIOTERRORISM:  
**TULAREMIA**

SOUTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONTROL

TACTICS AGAINST TERRORISM: **TULAREMIA**

South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control  
Office of Public Health Preparedness



## **What is bioterrorism?**

Bioterrorism is the intentional use of bacteria, viruses, or natural toxins (poisons) as a weapon to kill, injure or produce disease in humans, animals or plants. Terrorists may use such an attack to create fear, disrupt the economy, or to get a response from the government.

## What is tularemia?

Tularemia is a serious illness caused by bacteria in nature that are capable of killing humans. The bacteria are found in small animals like rats, mice, squirrels, prairie dogs and rabbits. It is sometimes called “rabbit fever.”

## How people get tularemia

**Tularemia is not spread from person to person. You can get tularemia by:**

- Being bitten by an infected insect such as a tick or deerfly
- Handling dead animals infected with tularemia
- Eating or drinking food or water that has the tularemia bacteria
- Breathing in the tularemia bacteria from the air.

You can become infected with Tularemia by inhaling a small amount of this bacteria.

## How tularemia can be used for terrorism

Terrorists can use tularemia bacteria as a weapon to strike many people at one time. Tularemia can be spread to people mainly in three ways:

- It can be released into the air.
- It can be added to a water source.
- It can be added to food.

### Symptoms of tularemia

- Sudden fever
- Chills
- Headaches
- Pain in joints like the knees or elbows
- Muscle aches
- Dry cough
- Weakness

**Depending on how you got the tularemia bacteria, you can have these symptoms:**

- Ulcers on your skin or in your mouth
- Swollen areas around your neck, ears and inner thigh
- Swollen and painful eyes
- Sore throat.

**You might also:**

- Catch pneumonia
- Have chest pain
- Have trouble breathing.

You can have symptoms three to five days after you've been exposed to the bacteria. It can take as long as two weeks for symptoms to appear.

## **Treating tularemia**

You can die from tularemia if you are not treated with the right antibiotics in time. There is no vaccine available in this country to prevent tularemia. If you have the symptoms of tularemia, you should see a doctor right away. Do not worry about giving it to someone else. It is not spread from person to person.

## How to protect yourself and others

- Use insect repellent containing DEET on your skin and clothes to stop insects from biting you.
- Wash your hands often using soap and water, especially if you have handled a dead animal.
- Cook your food until it is well done.
- Make sure you use clean water.
- Get rid of places where rodents can nest.
- Clean up areas, such as standing water, where insects can breed.
- Call a veterinarian if your pet becomes ill after being exposed to a rodent (such as a rat, squirrel, or prairie dog) or a rabbit.

## What's being done to protect you

- The South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) keep constant watch for cases of tularemia. Every case of tularemia is treated as an emergency. Doctors and hospitals are required by law to report cases of tularemia to their local health department. If someone might be sick from tularemia, DHEC and CDC will take steps to help stop others from getting sick.
- DHEC shares information with other states about tularemia cases.
- Readily available antibiotics are used to treat tularemia.

If there is a terrorist event using tularemia, local and state law enforcement and health agencies will provide you additional instructions for protecting yourself.

## Numbers to know

**For all emergencies:** 9-1-1

**SC DHEC** (*during business hours*): (803) 898-3432

**CDC:** (800) 232-4636

**Palmetto Poison Center:** (800) 222-1222

## For more information

### SC DHEC

[www.scdhec.gov](http://www.scdhec.gov)

[www.scdhec.gov/tat](http://www.scdhec.gov/tat) (*Tactics Against Terrorism*)

[www.scdhec.gov/health/disease/han/tularemia.htm](http://www.scdhec.gov/health/disease/han/tularemia.htm)

### CDC

[www.bt.cdc.gov](http://www.bt.cdc.gov)

[www.bt.cdc.gov/agent/tularemia](http://www.bt.cdc.gov/agent/tularemia)

### USDA

[www.fsis.usda.gov](http://www.fsis.usda.gov)

The phone numbers for reporting cases or possible cases of bioterrorism to your local health department and the DHEC Division of Acute Disease Epidemiology are available at: [www.scdhec.gov/administration/library/CR-009025.pdf](http://www.scdhec.gov/administration/library/CR-009025.pdf)

*This publication provides health information for your general knowledge. Talk to your doctor about your concerns about any medical condition. DHEC does not recommend you diagnose or treat yourself for a serious illness.*











South Carolina Department of Health  
and Environmental Control

[www.scdhec.gov/tat](http://www.scdhec.gov/tat)

SOUTH CAROLINA

A map of South Carolina in a light brown color. Overlaid on the map is the text 'Tactics Against Terrorism' in a white, serif font. 'Tactics' is on the top line, 'Against' is on the middle line, and 'Terrorism' is on the bottom line.

Tactics  
Against  
Terrorism

Be Safe. Be Smart.