

## **Rabbit hunters encouraged to take precautions against Tularemia**

A rabbit hunter in eastern North Carolina recently tested positive for Tularemia, also commonly called rabbit fever. Another rabbit hunter in the same party also became ill and it is suspected he also has tularemia. We are happy to report that both hunters are recovering, but this serves as an important reminder to all rabbit hunters to take precautions to prevent contracting tularemia.

**What is tularemia?** Tularemia is a disease caused by a bacteria, *Francisella tularensis*, and the disease occurs naturally worldwide.

**How can I get tularemia?** The most common way people have been infected with tularemia in North Carolina was by handling infected rabbits, a bite from an infected cat, and from a tick bite. Transmission is also possible from ingestion of undercooked meat, drinking contaminated water, or inhalation of contaminated dust.

**How common is tularemia?** Tularemia is uncommon in North Carolina, with nine reported cases from 2006 through 2010. However, as these recent cases show, hunters should always take precautions when handling animals.

**What are the symptoms of tularemia?** Signs usually appear in 3-5 days after exposure. Symptoms are influenza-like, with high fever, chills, fatigue, body aches, headache and nausea. There is sometimes a skin lesion or ulcer at the place of transmission. Glands or lymph nodes may become swollen and painful. Other signs are skin rash, sore throat, or swelling of eyes.

### **How can I protect myself from tularemia?**

With these basic precautions, you can still enjoy rabbit hunting and eating your harvested rabbits.

- When handling rabbits, always wear gloves.
- Wash your hands after touching any animal, especially before you eat.
- Cook rabbit meat thoroughly (170 degrees).
- To prevent tularemia transmission to your pets, do not feed them raw meat.
- Wear insect repellents that contain DEET.
- Only drink water from a safe source.