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PRESS RELEASE

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Tularemia Infection Suspected

A case of Tularemia is suspected in a North Pole resident after the man became ill after skinning a potentially infected hare earlier this year. Colorado is reporting the largest outbreak ever in that state, with 11 human cases in May alone. New Mexico is also having an outbreak of human cases.

Tularemia is an infection caused by the *Francisella tularensis* bacteria. It most often kills hares but can also make people, dogs, and cats seriously ill. While it can be fatal if untreated, it is easily cured if diagnosed quickly and the correct antibiotics are prescribed. The most common signs in people and pets are lethargy with high fever and swollen lymph nodes.

Hares are the primary host and the disease is spread by ticks. The species of tick known to carry the bacteria prefer to live on hares, but will occasionally bite dogs, cats, or people. Although tick bites are one possible cause, pets most often get tularemia from mouthing or catching a sick hare. Interior residents, including trappers, can become infected by handling the hares or from the pet's saliva, even before the pet exhibits signs of illness.

Tularemia most often diagnosed in hares and pets in the Interior between Memorial Day and Labor Day because it is spread by ticks which are active during the summer.

"Although cases of tularemia in humans are rare and can be avoided by adhering to safety precautions. Do not allow your pets to roam free or have access to sick hares. Dogs and cats that go out of doors can be treated with a veterinary product that will kill ticks within 24 hours so that disease transmission doesn't occur from ticks feeding on pets" said wildlife veterinarian Dr. Kimberlee Beckmen.

If your pet does come in contact with a dead hare, wear gloves or use a plastic bag to take the animal away from the pet and wash hands thoroughly after handling anything coming out of the pet's mouth. Thoroughly wash any scratches, bites, or wounds made by pets or wildlife immediately with soap and water, and seek medical attention, especially if fever, redness, swelling or flu-like symptoms appear afterward. Double bag and dispose of dead hares in the trash or bury where dogs and scavengers cannot get to them.

The ADF&G website contains more information and a form to submit ticks or dead wildlife for examination: <http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=disease.main>

Email dfg.dwc.vet@alaska.gov to report sick or dead wildlife, or call the Wildlife Health Reporting and Information Line: 907-328-8354

More information about ticks in Alaska is contained in an article in the Alaska Fish & Wildlife News at: http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=wildlifeneews.view_article&articles_id=557

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