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PRESS RELEASE

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Tularemia Hot Spot Noted

Tests have confirmed that a snowshoe hare from the Fairbanks area died of Tularemia last week.

"Hares die of this infection every spring and summer in the Interior," said wildlife veterinarian Dr. Kimberlee Beckmen. "This is the first hare we've tested this year, but we've had multiple reports of sick hares and expect more."

A local resident transported a sick hare with many ticks to a Fairbanks veterinary clinic. The hare was dead on arrival and was submitted to ADF&G for postmortem examination. Lab tests performed at the state diagnostic lab in Colorado confirmed the presence of *Franciella tularensis*, the bacteria that causes the disease known as Tularemia.

Tularemia is a bacterial disease that typically affects hares, beavers and muskrats. Predators and scavengers including dogs and cats that bite into a sick or dead hare as well as people who handle infected hares can become infected. Ticks, which are common on hares, and water contaminated with a dead animal, as well as ticks, can also spread the bacteria to animals and people. The most common symptoms in people include skin ulcers, swollen and painful lymph glands, inflamed eyes, sore throat, mouth sores, fever, flu-like illness, diarrhea or pneumonia. Tularemia can be fatal if the person is not treated with appropriate antibiotics. However, human cases in Alaska are rare and one case is reported about every two years.

Beckmen encouraged people to contact ADF&G at 459-7206 if they notice hares that appear to be ill. Signs that a hare is infected include lack of fear of people, "tameness", lethargy, and sudden death. People can protect themselves by using gloves or a plastic bag if they have to touch a dead hare, and washing their hands afterwards. Don't drink untreated water from areas where muskrats and beavers occur. Double bag and dispose of dead hares in trash or bury where dogs and scavengers can not get to them.

Dog and cat owners can protect their pets by keeping them away from snowshoe hares. Dogs or cats that become infected may show fever, lethargy, lack of appetite and swollen lymph nodes. Infected animals can be successfully treated by veterinarians with antibiotics. It is important to treat pets promptly not only for their sake, but because tularemia can be contracted through the bite of an infected pet. Hares, voles and squirrels in Alaska are frequently infected by a tick which can also transmit the bacteria to people or pets. It is the spread by ticks that leads to the typical annual infections of hares between Memorial Day and Labor Day, while there are no cases detected during the winter months.

For more information about Tularemia see: <http://www.cdc.gov/Tularemia/>

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