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## PRESS RELEASE

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### Sick Hares are the Annual Sentinel for Tularemia

A sick hare with signs of Tularemia was killed by a North Pole resident on May 11<sup>th</sup>. The disease was present based on observations during a necropsy performed today by ADF&G wildlife veterinarian, Dr. Kimberlee Beckmen. In addition, a Fairbanks veterinarian reported a suspected case of Tularemia in a dog from the Chena Hot Springs area last week. The dog was found eating a hare two days prior to becoming severely ill with fever.

“Outbreaks of Tularemia in dogs and cats that come in contact with sick hares occur in the Fairbanks North Star Borough every May and June” said Dr. Beckmen, “but this year’s cases are about two weeks earlier than usual”. Tularemia is 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.

Last summer, a North Pole man became ill after skinning an infected hare. Additionally in 2015, Colorado saw the largest outbreak in state history with 11 human cases in May alone and New Mexico also documented a significant 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 hare and squirrel ticks that have always been present on wildlife in Alaska. The species of tick known to carry the bacteria prefer to live on hares and rodents, but will occasionally bite dogs, cats, or people. Two species of dog ticks have become established around urban areas in Alaska and are also capable of spreading the disease (documented in a recently submitted manuscript to the Journal of Medical Entomology).

While 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.

“Although cases of tularemia in humans are rare, they 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 Dr. 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](mailto: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](http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=wildlifeneews.view_article&articles_id=557)

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