



# COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO NEWS RELEASE

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## **RARE CASE OF TULAREMIA RECORDED IN SAN DIEGO COUNTY**

*Public Urged to Take Steps to Avoid Contact with Ticks, Wild Animals to Avoid Rare Disease*

The San Diego County Health and Human Services Agency (HHS) announces a case of tularemia in San Diego County. Tularemia is very rare and usually is not very serious.

“An elementary school-age child was infected after pulling ticks off of a wild rabbit captured by the child’s parent,” said Nancy Bowen, M.D., San Diego County Public Health Officer. “The child was never hospitalized and has recovered.”

Tularemia is carried by ticks, which become infected by biting infected rodents, rabbits and other animals. Symptoms include lymph node swelling, headache and fever, all of which were experienced by the child. Other symptoms include skin ulcer at site of bite, fatigue, body aches and nausea. It is not transmitted person to person. It can cause death in rare cases.

Symptoms usually appear three to five days after exposure, but can take as long as 14 days.

Tularemia also can be transmitted by eating infected meat or drinking water contaminated by an animal. It occurs in nature and is so unusual that in the entire state each year, only one or two human cases are typically recorded. In 2002 and 2003, two wild rabbits were confirmed with tularemia in north coastal San Diego County.

San Diego County Vector Control regularly tests ticks for tularemia. The San Diego County Veterinarian tests rabbits that are reported ill or dead.

HHS urges the public to take the following precautions to avoid getting tularemia:

- Do not handle wild rabbits or other wild creatures
- Avoid contact with ticks (use insect repellent when outdoors)
- Thoroughly cook rabbit meat

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