97th Air Mobility Wing Public Affairs Office

ALTUS AIR FORCE BASE, Okla. -

Altus AFB has had a decline in the rabbit population on base over the past few weeks. A multi-disciplinary team comprised of Public Health, Pest Management, Bioenvironmental Engineering, and Wing Safety have been looking into why this happened and recently discovered “rabbit fever,” a disease known as tularemia, as the likely cause. Tularemia is a bacteria that occurs naturally in many parts of North America. Aside from rabbits and hares, it can also be found in other animals such as rodents.

Can I get it?

Tularemia can rarely be passed on to humans. It is treated with an antibiotic. Humans can be infected by:

• Tick and deer fly bites

• Skin contact with infected animals

• Inhalation of disturbed contaminated carcasses (such as mowing over a carcass)

Common symptoms are a skin ulcer, enlarged lymph nodes, and high fever. Other symptoms that can be present are chills, headaches, diarrhea, muscle aches, joint pain, and cough.

What should I do?

Preventing exposure to tularemia involves simple tips that should already be practiced regularly.

-If you discover a sick or dead animal located in base housing, call Balfour Beatty Maintenance to place a work order at (580)482-0073. If a sick or dead animal is located in other areas on base, call Civil Engineering Customer Service to place a work order at (580)481-6606.

-Use insect repellent containing DEET to prevent insect bites. Wash your hands frequently, using soap and warm water. Be sure food is cooked thoroughly and water is consumed from a safe source. Check areas prior to mowing and do not disturb sick or dead animals.

-Note any change in the behavior of house pets if they come in contact with any of the animals mentioned. Consult a veterinarian if they develop unusual symptoms.

-Public Health recommends eliminating potential areas for rodent harborage by controlling access to food, water, and shelter. Additionally, ensure tight fitting seals around door and window closures.

-If you hunt, trap, or skin animals, use gloves when handling, especially with rabbits, muskrats, prairie dogs, and other rodents. Cook wild game meat to an internal temperature of 165°F for 15 seconds prior to consuming.

-If you develop any concerning symptoms after possible exposure, contact your primary care manager (PCM) by calling the appointment line at (580) 481-5235. You may contact Public Health at (580) 481-5488 with any questions or visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website at <http://www.cdc.gov/tularemia/index.html>

For updates on Tularemia and other environmental matters, visit the environmental information section of the base website, Altus.af.mil. If you have any additional questions or concerns contact the Altus AFB Public Affairs Office at (580)481-7700.