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For Immediate Release

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Increase in Tularemia Cases

Southwest Nebraska Public Health Department (SWNPHD) has received reports of three cases of tularemia in the health district over the past month. Tularemia can be spread by tick bites, deer fly bites or contact with infected animals such as wild rabbits. Tularemia can be prevented by wearing insect repellent and keeping a safe distance from wildlife.

“This is a concerning number of cases for this tickborne disease,” explains Melissa Propp RN, Clinic Manager at SWNPHD. “Only 6 cases of tularemia were reported to us during the past 10 years, so getting three cases in a month is unusual. We encourage everyone to take extra precautions to avoid tick bites.”

Tularemia is caused by bacteria that get into the body when someone is bitten by an infected tick or touches an infected rabbit or rodent. The symptoms are fever, headache, swollen glands in the armpit or groin, and skin ulcers at the site of the bite. Tularemia can be life-threatening, but most infections are treated successfully with antibiotics.

How to prevent tularemia:

- Use bug spray that prevents tick bites with DEET or other EPA-approved ingredients.
- Use permethrin on tents and camping gear to repel ticks.
- Keep a safe distance from wild rabbits and other rodents.
- If you need to handle wild animals, use gloves and wash your hands well afterwards.

If you are bitten by a tick, follow safe tick removal steps:

- Grasp the tick close to the skin with tweezers.
- Pull the tick straight out, do not twist or bend.
- Flush it down the toilet or wrap it in tape and throw it away.
- Clean the bite with soap and water.

Avoid squeezing the body of the tick and do not use creams or chemicals to try to make it remove itself, as that could make it push infected fluid into the skin. Contact your healthcare provider right away if you develop symptoms after being bitten by a tick.

You may get different illnesses depending on the type of tick and where it lives. The Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) released information in May through the Health Alert Network (HAN) about all the tickborne diseases that are in Nebraska, including tularemia. The HAN is used for sharing important and timely information about public health, and can be found at dhhs.ne.gov/HAN.

More information on tularemia may be found at cdc.gov/tularemia or contact SWNPHD at 308-345-4223. Southwest Nebraska Public Health Department serves Chase, Dundy, Frontier, Furnas, Hayes, Hitchcock, Keith, Perkins, and Red Willow counties. Information can also be found on SWNPHD's Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube.

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