Tularaemia - cause of NSW wildlife deaths: information for wildlife carers and handlers

Background

- Tularaemia (*Francisella tularensis*) was confirmed for the first time in Australian animals in 2016.
- A new method of testing resulted in a diagnosis of tularaemia (*Francisella tularensis*) infection in two ringtail possums that died in separate clusters in 2002 and 2003.
- This finding was not unexpected given that there had been reported human cases of tularaemia in Australia, including two separate cases in Tasmania from 2011.
- Worldwide, tularaemia can affect a wide range of mammals including rabbits, hares, rodents and wildlife. It may cause acute blood poisoning (septicaemia) and sudden death in these species.
- Overseas, tularaemia has been shown to spread to humans who have direct contact with sick animals, direct contact with water or tissues contaminated by sick animals or via tick or other insect bites. For information on symptoms in humans please refer to the NSW Health factsheet.

Current situation

- A probable human case has recently been identified in NSW in 2020.

Advice to wildlife carers and handlers re sick or dead wildlife

Tularaemia may cause infection in humans but this is extremely rare in Australia.

- Avoid direct contact with dead wildlife.
- Minimise handling of sick wildlife.
- Wear gloves when handling wildlife and make sure the animal is well restrained.
- Cover cuts and abrasions with a waterproof dressing.
- Wash and dry hands after handling animals.
- Do not eat or smoke while handling animals. Wash and dry hands before eating or smoking.
- For advice on sick animals contact a private veterinarian.

Reporting unusual signs of disease or death in wildlife

For advice on sick animals contact a private veterinarian.

To report unusual signs of disease or death in wildlife:

- Contact your state *Wildlife Health Coordinator*, or
- Ring the emergency animal disease hotline on 1800 675 888.

Signs of tularaemia in animals

- Signs of tularaemia in animals are vague and vary between animals.
Tularemia may present as a mass die off event in wildlife such as ringtail possums, rabbits and hares.

For advice on human health

- If you have any concerns regarding your health or the health of other people in-contact with the suspect animal contact your GP or your local public health unit on 1300 066 055 and tell them that you have had contact with a sick animal.
  

Further Information

- Wildlife Health Australia- Tularemia and Australian wildlife fact sheet
- WHO Guidelines on Tularemia
  http://www.cdc.gov/tularemia/resources/whotularemiamanual.pdf
- NSW Health Tularemia Factsheet
- DPI webpage on wildlife health and disease