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Proper preparation before cooking

By SHANNON TOMPKINS
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Two good things happen when hunters take **feral hogs**: an invasive species that does tremendous damage to land, wallets and native wildlife is removed, and the hunter has the foundation of an excellent meal.

Feral hog meat is lean and incredibly tasty; some consider feral pork superior to almost all other wild game.

But getting that pork from **pig** to plate means having to carefully negotiate a potentially dangerous act: cleaning the hog.

A fair percentage of feral hogs carry viral and **bacterial diseases** transmissible to humans, including **brucellosis**, tularemia, salmonellosis, anthrax, leptospirosis and toxoplasmosis.

(They also can carry several diseases — primarily hog cholera, pseudorabies and bovine tuberculosis — that can be transmitted to

livestock. This scares the heck out of livestock producers who face tremendous economic losses if feral hogs **infect** their herds.)

Studies indicate about 10 percent of **Texas'** feral hogs have been exposed to brucellosis. But in some areas of the state, as many as 20-25 percent of those tested were positive for the bacterial disease that can cause **flu-like symptoms**. Data from state and federal health agencies indicate 20-40 cases of swine brucellosis a year in Texas, with most of them traced back to infections caused by exposure to infected feral hogs.

A recent study looking for brucellosis in Texas feral hogs turned up high infection rates of tularemia, another bacterial disease that, in humans, causes flu-like symptoms. It is sometimes called "rabbit fever" because rabbits and other rodents have been common vectors of the disease in humans.

The study, conducted through **Texas Tech University's** Institute of Environmental and Human Health, collected and tested about 130 feral hogs from **Crosby County** near Lubbock and Bell and Coryell counties near Waco.

Half of the animals from Crosby and 15 percent of the pigs from Bell and Coryell showed evidence of current or past tularemia infection.

While tularemia and brucellosis can cause pretty severe illnesses, neither is considered particularly deadly to a healthy adult. But they can be life-threatening for someone with a compromised immune system.

The bacterial and viral diseases carried by feral hogs are usually found in the animal's blood or other body fluids. (Thorough cooking destroys any disease-causing agents in the meat.)

The federal **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention** offer these recommendations for hunters handling feral hogs:

- Avoid all contact with visibly ill animals or those found dead.
- Use clean, sharp knives for field dressing and butchering.
- Wear eye protection and rubber or latex gloves (disposable or reusable) when handling carcasses.
- Avoid direct contact (bare skin) with fluid or organs from the hog.
- Burn or bury disposable gloves and inedible parts of the carcass after butchering.
- Wash hands as soon as possible with soap and warm water for 20 seconds or more and dry hands with a clean cloth.
- Clean all tools and reusable gloves used in field dressing and butchering with a disinfectant-such as dilute bleach.


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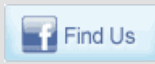

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