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Infected Feral Hogs Found In 2 Local Counties

Researchers Monday warned area farmers, ranchers and hunters to use caution when handling wild game after finding evidence of an infection in feral hogs, one type of which is so lethal to humans it's considered a viable bio-weapons agent.



(File photo)

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(January 24, 2011)—Researchers at Texas Tech University's Institute of Environmental and Human [Health](#) warned area farmers, ranchers and hunters Monday to use caution when handling wild game after finding evidence of the bacteria that causes tularemia in feral hogs in Bell and Coryell Counties. Font Size: [A](#) [A](#) [A](#)

Tularemia is a serious infectious disease caused by the bacteria Francisella tularensis, said Steve Presley, a zoonotic disease researcher who [leads](#) the team that tested about 130 feral hogs from Bell, Coryell and Crosby Counties.

Rodents and wild [game](#) animals as well as mosquitoes, deer flies and ticks, can carry tularemia, which is commonly known as rabbit fever, he said.

Fifteen percent of the feral hogs from the two Central Texas counties and 50 percent of those from Crosby County showed evidence of current or past infection, he said.

"We have found high levels of antibodies in these pigs that show they have been infected with Francisella tularensis and found that some of these pigs were actively infected with it," Presley said.

"The bacteria are constantly present in animals in this area and the feral hog population, but normally it's only a small number of cases. This is a huge number of infected animals."

What the researchers have yet to determine is the subspecies of bacteria infecting the hogs.

The Type B subspecies can cause illness in wildlife, domestic animals and humans, but poses a less serious health threat to humans, Presley said.

But the Type A subspecies can be lethal to humans, he said, and the U.S. Centers For Disease Control and Prevention considers it a viable bio-weapons agent.

Regardless of which type it turns out to be, Presley says anyone who may come into contact with wild animals—especially those that might hunt or eat wild hogs—should be cautious.

"If you are handling or cleaning or eating wild game, particularly hogs, deer or rabbits, you should be wearing rubber gloves and eye protection when you're dressing wild game," he said.

"The bacteria can enter any sort of small cut or hangnail. During this time of year, it might not be as big of an issue, but you should check yourself for ticks, wear tick repellent and avoid biting flies, including mosquitoes."

Presley also recommends making sure game meats are thoroughly cooked before eating them and says homeowners and lawn care professionals should look for wild rabbit nests hidden in tall grasses prior to mowing.

The discovery was made while the researchers were looking for brucellosis.

They found no evidence of that disease, and were surprised to find evidence of tularemia, said Brad Dabbert, associate chairman of Tech's Department of Natural Resources Management.

"Traditionally, it's a rabbit disease, but it does get reported in birds and other mammals," Dabbert said.

"Since hogs can range over large areas, it's certainly possible that they can transport this stuff. That's kind of the critical issue now. The other thing we're trying to do is look for it in other animals now to more accurately [answer](#) that question," he said.

Between 2000 and 2008, only eight human cases of tularemia were reported in Texas, Tech said Monday.

About 125 are reported each year in the U.S., Tech said.




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Texas AgriLife Extension Service says feral hogs can be found in 230 of Texas' 254 counties and cause annual damages of nearly \$400 million.

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Posted by: Pig killer Location: close to home on Jan 25, 2011 at 09:38 AM

The main problem is this , People that own land do not want these pigs , but are not willing to let folks like me and others that hunt and trap /catch wild hogs . So the problem continues to grow . If you want them gone put a ad in the paper /cregslit and i can almost guarentee you the hogs would be gone from your place in no time . Make people sign a agreement to cover your self and property .

Posted by: KB Location: Gatesville on Jan 25, 2011 at 09:21 AM

Driving on the rural roads outside of Gatesville you'll see many, many hogs that have been hit by vehicles. We see herds of wild hogs running through the fields near our property and just the other day saw a pregnant sow running alone across the neighbor's place. She'll have about 10 piglets several times a year. Our kids don't stray far from the house after dark because we can hear the pigs. We haven't seen any on our place but we've seen evidence they're there. They tear the ground up & leave nothing but pitted mud. As for killing them... I'm for it. I don't know about keeping the meat now. Does cooking it kill the bacteria?

Posted by: richard easley Location: the grove tx on Jan 25, 2011 at 09:17 AM

I Run dogs , and have been running dogs for a long time . We aint ever came in contact with any disease . I Believe its out thier , but how many people have died from it in the last 10 years ? The 700lb pig is possible , but not very likely . the biggest ive ever caught is 480 lbs . that was with the dogs .

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