Tularemia

Agent: *Francisella tularensis* (bacteria)
Mode of Transmission: In the United States, by the bite of an infected tick such as the American dog tick, the lone star tick, the blacklegged tick or occasionally by the bite of an infected deer fly. Hunters can contract the disease while cleaning infected game or when eating poorly cooked, infected meat. Humans may also become infected by drinking water contaminated by infected animals, or by breathing *F. tularensis* spores from the dried carcasses or pelts of animals that died from tularemia.
Signs/Symptoms: Vary depending on the mode of transmission, but usually include sudden onset of high fever, chills, fatigue, general body aches, headache and nausea. Pneumonia may complicate the disease and requires prompt identification and specific treatment to prevent development of serious, life-threatening illness.
Prevention: Avoid the bites of ticks or deer flies and avoid untreated water in areas where tularemia is prevalent among wild animals. Use impervious protective gloves when skinning rabbits and other wild game. Avoid contaminating other food items with utensils used for preparing meat from game and do not eat undercooked meat.
Other Important Information: Tularemia is classified as a potential bioweapon because its spores are relatively easy to disseminate as a breathable aerosol or as a food and water contaminant.

One case of tularemia was reported in Virginia in 2008. This is slightly fewer than the three cases reported in 2007, but similar to the five year average of 1.4 cases per year. The case occurred in a white male in the 1-9 year age group from the central region. The infection was associated with a tick bite. Prior to 2007, the last reported cases of tularemia in Virginia occurred in 2003.