

Nine beavers die from disease in Utah—and it can spread to people, officials say

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Beavers are being found dead in Utah, and the disease killing them can spread to humans, officials said.

So it's important not to touch any dead animals—especially rodents—while [wildlife officials](#) learn more about the "unusual" event that killed nine [beavers](#) so far since the end of March, Utah's Division of Wildlife Resources said in a news release.

The beavers were found dead in Summit, Wasatch and Utah counties, officials said.

Officials tested several of them and discovered they were positive for a disease called tularemia, also known as [rabbit fever](#), hare plague and deerfly fever—because it can be transmitted through a tick or deerfly bite.

It's an "acute, fatal infectious disease of rabbits, hares and other rodents, including beavers" that is "present throughout North America," officials said.

The last confirmed case of the disease killing wildlife in Utah was a cottontail rabbit in the Kanab area in 2017, officials said.

"The bacteria that causes this infection is known to be in the environment in many parts of Utah; however, it is unusual to see this many animals die from it at once," DWR veterinarian Ginger Stout said in the release.

The first five dead beavers were found near the Swaner Preserve & EcoCenter by the preserve's staff between March 23 and April 2, officials said. All five of the beavers shared a lodge at the preserve.

A DWR fisheries crew found another dead beaver near Midway on April

5, officials said. Two more beavers and a vole were found dead near the Jordanelle Dam on April 8, and the ninth dead beaver was found in the Birdseye area of Utah County on April 10.

Humans are susceptible to tularemia and are typically exposed through tick or deerfly bites in the summer and from handling infected animals harvested during hunting and trapping seasons, officials said.

It can be life-threatening for people if it isn't treated quickly, but most infections can be treated with antibiotics, officials said.

"There is a concern about the possibility of tick-borne or fly-borne diseases, so it's advised to take the necessary precautions by wearing [protective clothing](#), using appropriate insect repellent, and checking for ticks after being in brushy areas," Stout said.

Anyone who spots dead rabbits, beavers or other rodents should avoid the carcasses and report it to the nearest DWR office, officials said.

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