

ROCKY MOUNTAIN SPOTTED FEVER (RMSF)

What is Rocky Mountain spotted fever?

Rocky Mountain spotted fever is an illness caused by an organism called *Rickettsia rickettsii*, which infects ticks throughout their lifetime and is passed on to the next generation of ticks. Rodents and other animals may also have the infection, but usually do not show symptoms.

Who gets Rocky Mountain spotted fever?

Anyone can get Rocky Mountain spotted fever who is bitten by an infected tick and on whom the tick remains for several hours. In spite of its name, the disease is rarely seen in the Rocky Mountain region; most cases are reported from eastern and central states such as North and South Carolina, Virginia, Georgia, Tennessee, Arkansas, Missouri, Kansas, and Oklahoma.

How is Rocky Mountain spotted fever spread?

People get Rocky Mountain spotted fever from the bite of an infected tick. There is no evidence of natural person-to-person transmission, however, there have been cases reported in persons who removed infected ticks from other people and in doing so, crushed the ticks and exposed themselves to infection from the tick.

What are the symptoms of Rocky Mountain spotted fever?

The disease causes moderate to high fever which may last a long time if not treated. Other symptoms include severe headache, body aches, and chills. In about half of the cases, a red, raised rash appears on the arms and legs, particularly on the palms of the hands and soles of the feet, and then spreads to the trunk. Rocky Mountain spotted fever can be fatal if not treated promptly.

How soon do symptoms usually appear?

The symptoms begin between 3 to 14 days after the tick bite.

How should a tick be removed?

Ticks should be removed promptly and carefully by using tweezers and applying gentle steady traction. Do not crush the tick's body when removing it and apply the tweezers as close to the skin as possible to avoid leaving tick mouth parts in the skin. Do not remove ticks with your bare hands. Protect your hands with gloves, cloth, or tissue and be sure to wash your hands after removing a tick.

How can Rocky Mountain spotted fever be prevented?

1. Avoid tick infested areas, especially during the warmer months.
2. Wear light colored clothing so ticks can be easily seen. Wear a long sleeved shirt, hat, long pants, and tuck your pant legs into your socks.
3. Walk in the center of trails to avoid overhanging grass and brush.
4. Check your body every few hours for ticks when you spend a lot of time outdoors in tick infested areas. Ticks are most often found on the thigh, arms, underarms and legs. Ticks can be very small (no bigger than a pinhead). Look carefully for new "freckles".
5. Use insect repellents containing DEET on your skin or permethrin on clothing. Be sure to follow the directions on the container and wash off repellents when going indoors.
6. Remove attached ticks immediately.

Where can I get more information?

- Your personal doctor
- Your local health department, listed in the telephone directory
- The Utah Department of Health, Bureau of Epidemiology (801) 538-6191

UTAH DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
BUREAU OF EPIDEMIOLOGY
August 2001