

Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever

FACTSHEET

Tick-Borne Typhus Fever

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
Division of Epidemiology, Disease Surveillance and Investigation
899 N. Capitol Street, NE, Suite 580
Washington, D.C. 20002
202-442-9371 Fax 202-442-8060 *
www.dchealth.dc.gov

What is Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever?

Rocky Mountain spotted fever is a bacterial disease transmitted by the bite of a tick. It is one of the most serious of the tick-borne illnesses in the United States.

Who gets Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever?

Rocky Mountain spotted fever can occur in persons of all ages and both sexes who have exposure to ticks. It is a seasonal disease and occurs throughout the United States during the months of April through September.

What are the symptoms of Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever?

The early symptoms of Rocky Mountain spotted fever are often generalized. Symptoms may include fever, nausea, vomiting, muscle pain, lack of appetite, and severe headache. Later signs and symptoms may include abdominal pain, joint pain, diarrhea and rash. The rash begins on the legs or the arms, may include the palms of the hands and/or the soles of the feet, and may spread rapidly to the trunk or rest of the body. Rocky Mountain spotted fever can be a severe illness and the majority of the patients are hospitalized.

How is Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever spread?

Rocky Mountain spotted fever is spread through the bite of an infected tick. The American dog tick and the Rocky Mountain wood tick are the primary carriers of Rocky Mountain spotted fever bacteria in the United States. Rocky Mountain spotted fever is not spread from person to person.

How soon do symptoms appear?

Symptoms usually begin about three to fourteen days after a tick bite.

Is a person with Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever contagious?

No, the disease is not spread from person-to person.

How is Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever treated?

There are several antibiotics available for the treatment of Rocky Mountain spotted fever.

Should a person with Lyme Disease be excluded from work or school?

During the acute phase of the disease a person with Rocky Mountain spotted fever will be too ill to work or attend school. It is not necessary to exclude a person with Rocky Mountain spotted fever from work or school once the person feels well enough to return.

How can Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever be prevented?

Rocky Mountain spotted fever can best be prevented by minimizing exposure to ticks. Some ways that this can be done include:

- Mowing grass frequently in yard to reduce tick populations
- Ticks should be controlled in pets through the use of special anti-tick collars or medications.
- Use of insect repellents containing DEET.
- Wear light colored clothing that covers legs and arms so that ticks may be more easily seen.
- Tucking pants into socks and/or boots.
- Tucking shirts into pants.
- Examine all parts of the body daily for the presence of ticks.
- Parents should check their children for ticks, especially in the hair, after playing outside.
- Pets should be checked carefully for the presence of ticks.
- Remove ticks promptly. Remove ticks by using gentle, steady traction with tweezers applied close to the skin to avoid leaving mouth parts in the skin. Following removal clean the bite area with soap and water.

Want more information?

Additional information about Rocky Mountain spotted fever and other related health topics can be found at the website www.cdc.gov. The DC Department of Health promotes the health and safety of the District residents. For additional information, please call 202-442-5842.

Revised 09-04

