

What is Rocky Mountain spotted fever?

Rocky Mountain spotted fever (RMSF) is a serious disease transmitted most commonly by the bite of an infected tick. The initial symptoms, which follow an incubation period of 3 to 14 days, include sudden onset of high fever, headache, chills, and muscle aches. A rash often appears a few days later. This rash generally begins on the extremities, especially the soles of the feet and palms of the hand, and spreads rapidly over the entire body. The classic three concurrent findings for this disease include fever, rash, and history of tick exposure. Prompt medical attention is extremely important because RMSF can be fatal without timely treatment with antibiotics.

What causes Rocky Mountain spotted fever?

In Texas, the American dog tick is the major carrier of spotted fever organisms (rickettsia). Other tick species, including the lone star tick, black-legged tick, and brown dog tick, may play a minor role in the transmission of disease-causing rickettsia. Hungry ticks usually position themselves on grass or small bushes and catch a ride when a person or animal passes. The tick generally crawls up the body looking for a place to attach. Ordinarily infection takes place when disease-causing rickettsia are inoculated into the skin through the bite of a feeding tick. Quick removal of ticks is important because they often must be attached several hours before they can transmit diseases. People who remove ticks can also become infected if they

crush ticks between their fingers, causing rickettsia to penetrate the skin. Thus, whenever ticks are handled, it is important to wash hands immediately. The peak months for RMSF in Texas are April through September, although the disease can occur throughout the year.

How is Rocky Mountain spotted fever diagnosed?

It is important to notify a physician if you become ill after contact with a tick. A diagnosis of RMSF will be based on clinical signs and symptoms and is confirmed by positive laboratory test results. Laboratory tests are available at the Texas Department of State Health Services in Austin.

How can you protect yourself?

- Keep your pets free of ticks. Consult with a veterinarian about the various safe, effective tick control and repellent products available for pets.
- Take protective measures when engaging in outdoor activities. Wear light-colored clothing so that ticks can be easily seen. Tuck pant legs into boots or socks. Use an approved repellent. Inspect all parts of your body for ticks after returning from tick-infested areas. Promptly remove attached ticks.
- Repellents containing permethrin can be applied to shoes and clothing and will last for several days. Repellents containing DEET can be applied to skin but will last only a few hours before needing to be reapplied.


How do you remove an attached tick?

- Use tweezers to grasp the tick at the surface of the skin. If tweezers are not available, use a tissue or paper towel to protect your fingers. Remember, exposure to the tick's body fluids may lead to infection.
- With a steady motion, pull the tick straight out. Do not twist or jerk the tick as this may cause the mouthparts to remain in the skin.
- After removing the tick, disinfect the bite site and wash hands with soap and water.





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