

FACT SHEET

Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever

(RMSF, tick fever)

What is Rocky Mountain spotted fever?

Rocky Mountain spotted fever (RMSF) is a disease caused by a bacterium *spread by ticks*. It is uncommon in Iowa. Most people with RMSF become ill between April and September.

Who gets RMSF?

Anyone can get RMSF, especially people who spend a lot of time outdoors in areas where ticks are found.

How is RMSF spread?

RMSF is acquired from the bite of an infected tick. Less commonly, people become ill after crushing a tick with their hands, because its body fluids get into cuts or scratches. RMSF cannot be spread from person to person.

What are the symptoms of RMSF?

RMSF usually causes a sudden high fever that may last 2 - 3 weeks if untreated. Fevers of 105-106° F are common. Severe headache, rash, abdominal pain, joint pain, diarrhea, and muscle aches may also occur.

How soon do symptoms appear?

Symptoms typically develop 5 - 10 days after the tick bite. Not everyone who is infected develops a rash.

What is the treatment for RMSF?

Antibiotics such as tetracycline, doxycycline or chloramphenicol are used to treat RMSF.

Can a person get RMSF more than once?

Probably not.

How should a tick be removed?

Any tick should be removed as soon as possible. The best way is to use tweezers to grab the tick as close to the skin as possible and pull it straight out. Do not squeeze the tick's body when removing it. Do not handle ticks with bare hands. Wash your hands after removing a tick. Apply an antiseptic on the bite.

How can RMSF be prevented?

1. Do not walk bare-legged in tall grass or woods where ticks are found.
2. Wear a long-sleeved shirt, long pants, and high socks. Tuck pants legs into socks. Wear light-colored clothing so crawling ticks can be seen more easily.
3. Conduct "tick checks" every two or three hours if spending a lot of time outdoors. Check all of your skin for ticks every day (you may need help to do this). Ticks are most often found on the thighs, arms, underarms, and legs. Parents should check children for ticks, especially in the hair, when returning from potentially tick-infested areas. Ticks may be carried into the household on clothing and pets. Both should be examined carefully.
4. Use tick repellents containing DEET for skin applications (using a lower concentration on children, but applying more often) or permethrin (apply to clothing). Always follow directions on the can. Wash off all repellents after going indoors.
5. Remove any attached ticks immediately, using the method above.