

Tickborne Illnesses



Ticks are abundant in Oklahoma and commonly feed on humans and other animals. Although only a small percentage of these ticks are infested with diseases causing bacteria, numerous tickborne illnesses, including Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever, Ehrlichiosis and Tularemia, are reported each year.

What is Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever?

Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever (RMSF) is the most severe tickborne illness in the United States. This disease is an infection from bacteria.

What are the symptoms of Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever?

Symptoms of illness start about 2 – 14 days after the tick bite. Symptoms may include:

- Fever
- Rash
- Headache
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Abdominal pain
- Muscle pain
- Lack of appetite
- Conjunctival injection (red eyes)

The majority of patients with RMSF are hospitalized.

What is Tularemia?

Tularemia is a potentially serious illness that is caused by bacteria and can be passed by a tick bite.

What are the symptoms of Tularemia?

The signs and symptoms of Tularemia vary depending on how the bacteria enters the body. Illness ranges from mild to life-threatening. All forms are accompanied by fever, which can be as high as 104° F.

What is Ehrlichiosis?

Ehrlichiosis is the general name used to describe many bacterial diseases that affect animals and humans.

What are the symptoms of Ehrlichiosis?

Symptoms appear 1 – 2 weeks after the tick bite and may be any of the following:

- Fever
- Headache
- Chills
- Malaise
- Muscle pain
- Nausea / vomiting / diarrhea
- Confusion
- Conjunctival injection (red eyes)
- Rash

What ticks are commonly associated with tickborne illnesses in Oklahoma?

- American Dog Tick
- Lone Star Tick
- Deer Tick

Is there treatment?

There are treatments for tickborne illnesses. Consult your doctor if you develop any of the symptoms mentioned for RMSF, Tularemia or Ehrlichiosis. Antibiotics can be prescribed and prompt treatment is best.

How do I remove a tick?

1. Using tweezers, grasp the tick close to the surface of the skin.
2. Pull slowly and steadily without jerking, twisting or crushing the tick.
3. After removing the tick, rub alcohol, an iodine scrub or soap and water to the bite area.
4. Dispose of a live tick by submersing it in alcohol, placing it in a sealed bag/container, wrapping it in tape or flushing it down the toilet. Never crush a tick with your fingers.

How can I prevent tickborne illnesses?

- Wear light-colored clothing as ticks are more visible.
- Tuck pants into socks.
- Apply insect repellent.
- After you come inside, check your body for ticks and remove them. Look along the hairline, around waistbands, underwear and armpits. Ticks like warm and dark places.
- Parents need to check their children.

For more information, please call the Tulsa Health Department at 918 582 WELL (9355).

Sources:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and Oklahoma State Department of Health (OSDH)

