

# Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever Fact Sheet

## Rocky Mountain spotted fever (RMSF)

- It is caused by the bacterium known as *Rickettsia rickettsii*.
- RMSF cases occur across the United States, but are most commonly reported in North Carolina, Tennessee, Missouri, Arkansas, and Oklahoma.

## Rocky Mountain spotted fever is transmitted in nature by the bite of infected ticks

- *Dermacentor variabilis*, also called the American dog tick, is the main transmitter of the infection in Maryland, and the eastern half of the United States.
- *Dermacentor andersoni*, called the Rocky Mountain wood tick, can also transmit the bacteria in the upper northwest section of the United States.
- *Rhipicephalus sanguineus*, also called the brown dog tick, can also transmit the bacteria in the southwestern United States.

## Signs and symptoms

- Signs and symptoms begin 3-12 days after a tick bite.
- Illness begins with sudden onset of fever and headache.
- Rash typically occurs 2-4 days after the onset of fever. It is highly variable and some people may fail to develop a rash.
- Other symptoms include nausea/vomiting, abdominal pain, body aches, and swelling around the eyes and on the back of hands.

## Diagnosis and treatment

- RMSF is a rapidly progressive disease and without early administration of treatment, it can be fatal within days. See your doctor right away if you think you might have RMSF.
- There are blood tests that can help diagnose Rocky Mountain spotted fever.
- Doxycycline is the most effective treatment for RMSF, including for children under 8 years of age.
- Make sure you inform your doctor of any recent tick bites and of being in any wooded areas.

## Keep Ticks Off

- Ticks are most active from late spring through early fall.
- Use Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)-registered insect repellents containing DEET, picaridin, IR3535, oil of lemon eucalyptus (OLE), para-menthane-diol (PMD), or 2-undecanone to prevent tick bites. Use as directed.
- Repellents containing DEET may be used on children over 2 months of age.
- Treat clothes with permethrin (do not use permethrin directly on skin).
- Wear long pants and long sleeves to help keep ticks off of skin, and tuck pant legs into socks and shirts into pants to keep ticks on outside of clothing.
- Wear light colored clothing to spot ticks more easily.
- Talk to your veterinarian about tick control products for your pets.
- When enjoying the outdoors, be aware that wooded or brushy areas with tall grass and leaf litter are prime tick habitat. Walk in the center of the trail.
- Check yourself, your kids, and your pets daily for ticks when spending time in tick habitat.
- Bathe or shower as soon as possible after coming indoors (within 2 hours) to wash off ticks.

## To Remove Ticks

- Use fine-tipped tweezers.
- Grab the tick close to the skin; do not twist or jerk the tick.
- Gently pull straight up until all parts of the tick are removed.
- Wash your hands with soap and water or an alcohol-based rub.
- Clean the site of the tick bite with soap and water or an antiseptic.
- Do not use petroleum jelly, a hot match, nail polish, or other products to remove ticks.

## For more information on tickborne diseases, visit:

- <https://www.cdc.gov/ticks/diseases>