

# ROCKY MOUNTAIN SPOTTED FEVER

(Tick Typhus)



## BASIC INFORMATION

### DESCRIPTION

An acute illness with fever caused by a germ transmitted by infected ticks. This is not contagious from person to person. It can involve the skin, central nervous system, gastrointestinal tract, and muscles. It can affect all ages but is more likely to occur in children and young adults. The disease gets its name from the area where it was first identified.

### FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

The following occur 3 to 12 days after a tick bite:

- Fever, often high, with chills.
- Red skin rash that begins on hands and feet and spreads to ankles, wrists, legs, trunk, and abdomen.
- Headache that may be severe.
- Muscle aches and weakness; stiff back.
- Nausea and vomiting.
- Mental confusion; coma.

### CAUSES

*Rickettsia* germs that live inside ticks. People are infected through tick bites, usually in the spring or summer. *Rickettsia* also infect rodents, squirrels, and chipmunks. The disease occurs in all states of the United States, especially on the East coast from Georgia to Maryland, and in heavy brush areas, such as Long Island.

### RISK INCREASES WITH

- Outdoor activities in tick-infested areas.
- Contact with dogs.

### PREVENTIVE MEASURES

- Wear protective clothing in tick-infested areas, and use insect repellent.
- During outdoor activity, carefully inspect the body frequently to remove ticks. If ticks are removed within 4 hours, it will reduce the risk of infection. Remove the tick with tweezers by grabbing as close to the skin as possible. Disinfect the bite site and wash hands with soap and water. Do not remove ticks by squeezing, using petroleum jelly (Vaseline), or burning them with a match. Save the tick in a plastic bag in a freezer. If illness occurs, it may be used to help with diagnosis.

### EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Curable, if treatment is begun in the early stages. Those with severe illness are more likely to develop complications.

### POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

- Brain infection.
- Seizures.
- Kidney failure.
- Hepatitis.
- Rocky Mountain spotted fever can be fatal if untreated (due to pneumonia or heart failure).



## DIAGNOSIS & TREATMENT

### GENERAL MEASURES

- Your health care provider will do a physical exam and ask questions about your symptoms and activities. Medical tests may include blood studies and skin biopsy (small piece of skin is removed to view under a microscope). The history of a tick bite or travel to a tick-infested area helps confirm diagnosis.
- Treatment is with drugs and supportive care.
- Patients with mild disease may be treated at home. Moderate to severe infections require hospital care. Treatment may include mechanical breathing support, blood transfusions, and close watch for complications such as kidney failure.
- Good mouth care is important.
- To learn more: Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, 1600 Clifton Rd, Atlanta, GA 30333; (800) 311-3435; website: [www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvrd/rmsf/](http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvrd/rmsf/).

### MEDICATIONS

Antibiotics, such as doxycycline, tetracycline, or chloramphenicol will be prescribed.

### ACTIVITY

Rest in bed until fever and other symptoms clear up.

### DIET

No special diet. Very ill patients may require intravenous (IV) feedings. For others, small frequent meals may be needed.



## NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF

- You or a family member has symptoms of Rocky Mountain spotted fever.
- New, unexplained symptoms develop. Drugs used in treatment may produce side effects.

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Special notes:

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More notes on the back of this page