



Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever & Lyme Disease

What are Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever and Lyme Disease?

Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever (RMSF) is a bacterial infection transmitted by ticks. Although RMSF is most common in the southeastern states, it occurs in almost every state. In our region, the Rickettsia bacteria that causes RMSF is found in the dog tick.

Lyme Disease (LD) is a bacterial infection that can also be passed to humans by a tick bite. Two types of ticks can carry LD: the deer tick and the Western black-legged tick. The deer tick is the most prevalent in our region, but Lyme Disease is rare in Guilford County.

How are RMSF and LD transmitted?

The infection is transmitted to humans by tick bites. Infections occur more often from April to September but may happen whenever ticks are active. The longer the tick stays attached to the skin, the greater the chance of infection. Most people who get RMSF or LD do not remember being bitten. The infection may also be transmitted through broken skin that comes in contact with the fluids of a crushed tick. This is why it is important to never crush a tick during removal. Neither RMSF nor LD can be passed from person to person.

What are the signs and symptoms of RMSF and LD?

RMSF symptoms usually occur suddenly, two to 14 days after the bite. Symptoms include sudden onset of fever, headache and muscle aches. A rash appears on the second to fifth day after fever. Fever may be absent in some cases. The rash starts as small red spots on the wrists, ankles, palms and soles and spreads up the legs and arms toward the body.

LD symptoms occur in three stages: rash and flu-like symptoms; headache, numbness in the facial area, muscle pain and heart problems; pain and swelling of knees and joints.

How do I prevent RMSF and LD?

Wear light colored clothing so ticks may be seen more easily and tuck pant legs into socks. Check yourself and your family for ticks after playing outdoors. Don't overlook a tick's favorite hiding places – scalp, ankles, behind the knees and the groin area. You should use insect repellent. When buying repellent for use on children, make sure you buy one formulated for children. Don't allow children to apply products. Use just enough repellent to cover skin and clothes and thoroughly wash hands afterwards. Pets bring ticks into the home, so check their skin and fur for ticks. Follow your veterinarian's advice about collars and other products that can keep your pets tick free.

What should I do if I find a tick on a family member?

If you find a tick on yourself or your child, remove it immediately. If the tick has already attached itself, cover your fingers with tissue paper or rubber gloves and use tweezers to grasp the tick as close to the head as possible. Pull steadily until the tick lets go. Take care not to crush the body of the tick. Note on your calendar the day the bite occurred. Clean and disinfect the bite area. Call your health care provider immediately if symptoms of fever or rash develop. Both RMSF and LD are treated with antibiotics.

For more information, call the Guilford County Department of Public Health at 336-641-7777 or visit

www.myguilford.com

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