

Tick Bites: What You Should Know

Tick-borne diseases are a group of illnesses that people can get from tick bites. Not all ticks carry the disease though. In North Carolina, we commonly see Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever, and sometimes Lyme Disease.

How Would I know if I was infected?

Signs and Symptoms:

- You may have a more serious illness from the tick bite if you start having **headaches, fever, or chills less than 2 weeks after exposure**. Other signs of an illness caused by the tick bite may be muscle weakness, feeling tired, or having trouble walking. These symptoms may tell your provider that you have gotten a more serious disease from the tick...
- **Lyme disease** is most commonly spread by the very small deer tick. The most common early sign of Lyme disease is the appearance of a rash on the skin that looks like a "bull's eye, but not everyone has the rash. Other symptoms include muscle or joint aches, stiff neck, headache, weakness, fever, swollen lymph nodes and other flu-like symptoms. If you have these symptoms in the spring and summer and fall, seek medical care **EVEN** if you did not know of any tick bites.
- **Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever** is spread by the American dog tick, the lone-star tick, and the wood tick. People with Rocky Mountain spotted fever get a sudden fever (which can last for 2 or 3 weeks), severe headache, tiredness, deep muscle pain, chills, nausea, and a characteristic rash. The rash might begin on the legs or arms, can include the soles of the feet or palms of the hands, and can spread rapidly to the trunk or the rest of the body.
- You may feel pain and swelling in the area of the tick bite. You may also get blisters, a red rash, and itching. These are **normal** symptoms of a tick bite, not necessarily a disease. If the redness gets worse, you could have a skin infection and should see your provider.

How soon after exposure do symptoms appear?

- Symptoms usually begin 3 to 12 days after a tick bite.

How are tick-borne diseases diagnosed and treated?

- The disease can be diagnosed by special blood tests, but it can take a couple of weeks for your body to develop antibodies and have a positive test. Usually if you have a tick bite followed by any warning signs, your provider will start antibiotics.

Removal

Ticks must be removed as soon as possible to try and keep you from getting diseases caused by tick bites. To remove the tick:

- Grasp the tick as close to the skin as possible. Pull it straight out and up with tweezers or with fingertips protected by a tissue or cloth.
- Pull gently until the tick lets go. Do not twist the tick or jerk it suddenly because this may break off the tick's head or mouth parts.
- Do not crush the tick or touch it with your bare hands. Flush the tick down the toilet after you have looked at it to see how big it is and what it looks like.
- **Do not** put a hot match, petroleum jelly, or fingernail polish on the tick. It is not helpful and, it may be dangerous.
- After the tick is removed, clean the area of the bite. Then, wash your hands with soap and water.

Prevention

Do's and Don'ts: Do the following to keep from getting tick bites when in an area where ticks live.

- Wear pants and long-sleeved shirts. Wear a hat in areas with trees.
- Put insect repellent on skin that is showing. Also, put insect repellent at the top of your boots, bottom of pant legs, and sleeve cuffs.
- Check your clothing, hair, and skin for ticks every 2 to 3 hours, especially the hairline, armpits, and waist.

If you have any questions, please call your provider!

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