



Hawaii State Department of Health

Disease Investigation Branch

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Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever

(tick-borne typhus fever)

What is rocky mountain spotted fever?

Rocky mountain spotted fever (RMSF) is an infection caused by bacteria called *Rickettsia rickettsii*. RMSF is present in parts of North and South America, but is not found in Hawaii.

How is it spread?

RMSF is spread to people by the bite of an infected tick. Ticks may become infected by feeding on infected mammals, (including dogs, rodents, and other small animals) that carry the bacteria. RMSF is not spread person-to-person.

What are the symptoms of RMSF?

The symptoms of RMSF include fever, nausea, vomiting, muscle pain, lack of appetite, and severe headache. In 2 to 6 days, a rash appears on the wrists and ankles that quickly spreads to the rest of the body. RMSF can be a severe illness that requires hospitalization.

The symptoms of RMSF are similar to many other illnesses. Blood tests are needed to diagnose the disease.

When do symptoms start?

Symptoms commonly start 7 days following the bite of an infected tick, but the onset can range from 3 to 14 days.

What is the treatment for RMSF?

A doctor can prescribe medicine to treat the disease. Early treatment increases the chances for a successful cure. If you become ill following a tick bite, see a doctor right away.

Ticks may also bite and fall off without being noticed. Any time you have been in a tick infested area and develop symptoms, you should see a doctor.

If you get RMSF once, can you get it again?

No, having the disease once protects you from getting it again.

How do you remove an attached tick?

Use fine-tipped tweezers, and protect your fingers with a tissue or latex gloves. Avoid removing ticks with bare hands. Grasp the tick as close to the skin surface as possible and pull upward with steady, even pressure. Do not twist or jerk the tick, as this may cause parts of the tick to break off and remain in the skin. Do not squeeze or crush the body of the tick because its fluids may contain bacteria.

After removing the tick, wash the affected area and hands with soap and water. It is important to remove the tick as soon as possible after finding it. Do not attempt to remove ticks by using petroleum jelly, lit cigarettes, or other home remedies; this may increase the chances of getting an infection.

How do you keep from getting RMSF?

The best way to prevent RMSF is to avoid exposure to ticks. When going into areas where ticks are found, wear clothing that covers the arms and legs. Tuck trouser legs into socks, and shirts into trousers.

Prevent ticks from attaching to you by applying insect repellents to trouser legs and sleeves.

Check the entire body for ticks every 3 to 4 hours.

For more information, see the CDC's website at

http://www.cdc.gov/ticks/diseases/rocky_mountain_spotted_fever/faq.html