

What is Rocky Mountain spotted fever?

Rocky Mountain spotted fever is a bacterial disease spread through the bite of an infected tick.

Although it was first identified in the Rocky Mountains, Rocky Mountain spotted fever is most commonly found in the southeastern part of the United States. It also occurs in parts of Canada, Mexico, Central America and South America.

How is Rocky Mountain spotted fever spread?

It is spread by several species of ticks in the United States, including the American dog tick (*Dermacentor variabilis*), Rocky Mountain wood tick (*Dermacentor andersoni*), and, in parts of the southwestern United States and Mexico, the brown dog tick (*Rhipicephalus sanguineus*).

What are the signs and symptoms of Rocky Mountain spotted fever?

The first signs and symptoms of Rocky Mountain spotted fever often mimic those of other illnesses:

- High fever
- Chills
- Severe headache
- Muscle aches
- Nausea and vomiting
- Confusion or other changes in the brain and/or nervous system.

How long after infection do symptoms appear?

Although many people become ill within the first week after infection, signs and symptoms may not appear for up to 14 days.

The red, non-itchy rash usually appears three to five days after the first signs and symptoms begin. The rash usually appears first on your wrists and ankles, and can spread in both directions — down into the palms of your hands and the soles of your feet, and up your arms and legs to your torso. Some people don't ever develop a rash.

Who is most at risk?

Factors that may increase your risk of getting Rocky Mountain spotted fever include:

- Living in an area where the disease is common
- The time of year — infections are more common in the spring and early summer
- How much time you spend in grassy or wooded areas
- Whether you have a dog or spend time with dogs.

What type of health problems are caused by Rocky Mountain spotted fever?

Some people who recover from severe Rocky Mountain spotted fever may be left with permanent damage, including amputation of

arms, legs, fingers, or toes (from damage to blood vessels in these areas); hearing loss; paralysis; or mental disability. Any permanent damage is caused by the acute illness and does not result from a serious, long-lasting infection.

How is Rocky Mountain spotted fever diagnosed?

Laboratory tests can check a blood sample, rash specimen or the tick itself for evidence of the organism that causes the infection. Because early treatment with antibiotics is so important, doctors don't wait for these test results before starting treatment if Rocky Mountain spotted fever is strongly suspected.

How is Rocky Mountain spotted fever treated?

People who develop Rocky Mountain spotted fever are treated with an antibiotic called Doxycycline within five days of developing symptoms. Pregnant women cannot take this antibiotic and will be prescribed a different medication.

How can Rocky Mountain spotted fever be prevented?

- Know where to expect ticks and avoid them. Ticks live in grassy, brushy, or wooded areas, or even on animals.
- Wear long pants and sleeves.
- Treat clothing and gear with products containing 0.5% permethrin. You can also buy permethrin-treated clothing and gear.
- Use insect repellents. Products containing DEET (Off! Deep Woods, Repel) often

repel ticks. Be sure to follow the instructions on the label.

- Visit the [Environmental Protection Agency \(EPA\)](#) for information about registered insect repellents containing DEET, picaridin, IR3535, Oil of Lemon Eucalyptus (OLE), para-menthane-diol (PMD), or 2-undecanone.
- Check yourself and your pets for ticks.

When removing a tick from your skin:

- Use tweezers to grasp the tick near its head or mouth and remove it carefully.
- Treat the tick as if it's contaminated; soak it in alcohol or flush it down the toilet.
- Clean the bite area with antiseptic.
- Wash your hands thoroughly.

Where can I get more information?

- Your personal healthcare provider
- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)
- [Mayo Clinic](#)

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