
Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever (RMSF)

Description: Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever is an infection caused by bacteria. It is diagnosed by signs and symptoms and a blood test.

Symptoms: The initial symptoms may include: fever, severe headache, nausea, muscle pain, vomiting, lack of appetite. Later signs and symptoms include: rash, joint pain, abdominal pain, diarrhea.

Although not every case will have a rash, a person with RMSF will often exhibit a fever, rash and history of a tick bite.

How it is Spread: RMSF is not spread person to person. It can be caught only by the bite of certain types of ticks. These ticks live in wooded areas and areas with high grass. Animals such as dogs and cats can carry the ticks home. In contrast to Lyme disease, the tick that carries RMSF is very common in Ohio.

Incubation Period: 5-10 days after a tick bite or handling an infected tick.

How Long Can a Person Spread the Infection to Others? RMSF cannot be spread from one person to another.

Responsibilities of Parents and Caregivers:

- Report RMSF to the local health department. They will probably already know about it; the blood tests are performed at the Ohio Department of Health.
- If a child is bitten by a tick or a tick is found on the child's body, be sure to tell the parents. If the child becomes ill, the parents can tell the doctor so that RMSF can be considered.

Control of Spread: The ticks that carry RMSF are common in Ohio. Though this does not mean all ticks are infected, you should take the following precautions just in case:

- Keep the yard and play area mowed.
- Do not allow children to play in tall grass.
- Check children's bodies and scalp (and your own) thoroughly for ticks if you have been on a field trip through woods or tall grass.
- If you find a tick, use tweezers to grasp the tick as close to the skin as possible. Slowly pull the tick straight out. Do not use hot matches, cigarettes, alcohol or nail polish. Put the tick in a small container of alcohol and throw in the trash can. Wash your hands and the bite site thoroughly.

Treatment: Only a doctor can diagnose RMSF. It is easily treated with antibiotics, especially when found early.