

Tick Borne Diseases Fact Sheet

(Lyme Disease, Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever, Tularemia, and Ehrlichiosis)

What is a tick?

Ticks are blood feeding parasites. They typically can be found in wooded or grassy areas, especially along the edges of trails, roads, and yards. Once on a host (deer, raccoons, and other wildlife), ticks crawl until they find a suitable spot to feed. Then they burrow their mouthparts into the skin for a blood meal.

Ticks can feed anywhere from several minutes to several weeks depending on their life stage, type of host, and type of tick. It is during feeding that infected ticks can transmit disease to their hosts.

What diseases can ticks spread?

Different types of ticks spread different diseases. The most common tick borne diseases in Michigan are:

- Lyme disease
- Tularemia
- Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever (RMSF)
- Ehrlichiosis

A tick has to be attached for at least 24 hours to spread disease.

What are the symptoms of tick borne diseases?

Early symptoms of many tick borne diseases are similar to the symptoms of the “flu”.

Lyme Disease

- Fever
- Headache
- Stiff neck or neck pain
- Tiredness
- Slowly expanding “bull’s eye” rash

Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever

- Sudden fever
- Chills
- Headache
- Muscle pain
- Reddish-to-purple rash

Tularemia

- Fever
- Chills
- Headache
- Muscle pain
- Joint stiffness
- Swollen lymph nodes
- Skin ulcer near tick bite

Ehrlichiosis

- Fever
- Headache
- Muscle aches
- Nausea
- Diarrhea
- Cough
- Joint pain
- Confusion

Tick borne diseases are rare in Michigan, but they do occur.

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Tick borne diseases can be serious if not properly diagnosed and treated. If you are ill and have had recent exposure to ticks, it is important to tell your doctor. This information could help accurately diagnose what is wrong with you.

How are tick borne diseases treated?

Lyme disease, Tularemia, Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever, and Ehrlichiosis are all treatable with antibiotics. People and domestic animals treated in the early stages with short courses of antibiotics usually recover quickly and fully.

How can tick borne diseases be prevented?

Ticks can attach to any part of the human body but prefer body creases and areas with hair such as the groin, armpits, sock line and scalp. The best way to prevent tick borne diseases is to reduce your risk of being bitten by a tick.

- Wear clothing that covers the arms, legs, and feet whenever you are outdoors.
- Wear light colored clothing to spot ticks easily.
- Apply insect/tick repellent containing DEET. Follow the product label directions for proper use.
- Walk in the center of trails to avoid contact with overgrown grass and brush at the edge of the trail.
- Check yourself, your children and pets thoroughly for ticks. Carefully inspect areas around the head, neck and ears. Look for what may appear like a new freckle or speck of dirt.

What do I do if I am bitten by a tick?

If you find a tick attached to your skin, promptly remove it. Grasp the tick using tweezers as close to the skin as possible. With a steady motion, pull the tick straight out. Do **not** twist or jerk. If tweezers are not available, grasp the tick with a piece of tissue. Wash your hands and apply antiseptic to the bite.

Occasionally, mouthparts of the tick stay attached to the skin. The mouthparts will not cause disease. If this happens, consult with your doctor about their removal.

Monitor the bite and be alert for early symptoms of tick borne disease particularly “flu-like” symptoms or rash over the next month or so. If you develop symptoms, call your doctor.

This fact sheet is for information only and is not meant to be used for self-diagnosis or as a substitute for talking with a health care provider. If you have any questions about tick borne diseases or think you may have one, call your health care provider.