

PUBLIC HEALTH FACT SHEET

Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever



Burlington County Health Department

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What is Rocky Mountain spotted fever?

Rocky Mountain spotted fever (RMSF) is a bacterial infection carried by ticks. People usually start having fevers and feeling nauseous about a week after being bitten by a tick, although some people do not remember having had a tick bite. A few days after the fever begins, people who have Rocky Mountain spotted fever often have a rash, usually on their arms or ankles. The rash often appears as small, flat, pink, non-itchy spots. Other symptoms include headache, nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain, muscle pain, lack of appetite, and red eyes. They also may have pain in their joints and stomach pain.

How do people get Rocky Mountain spotted fever?

People get RMSF when they are bitten by an infected tick. Dogs can also become infected. Since dogs and people can get Rocky Mountain spotted fever from the same ticks, it is important to check pets for possible ticks. The longer the tick stays attached to the skin, the greater the chance of infection. Several hours of attachment are usually necessary for the infection. **Rocky Mountain spotted fever is not contagious from person to person.**

How is Rocky Mountain spotted fever treated?

A doctor or health care provider can diagnose RMSF by observing symptoms and asking about possible tick exposure. If RMSF is suspected, a blood test will be performed to confirm. It is treated with antibiotics, usually over the course of 7 to 10 days.

NOTE: It is very important to finish all of the antibiotics that are prescribed, even if you are feeling better. Not finishing them may result in the illness not completely going away and becoming more difficult to treat.

Where can you get more information?

- Your doctor, nurse or clinic
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website at: <http://www.cdc.gov/>
- The Burlington County Department of Health at (609)-265-5548 or <http://www.co.burlington.nj.us/departments/health>
- The New Jersey Department of Health (NJDoH) at (609) 292-9560 or on the NJDHSS website at <http://www.state.nj.us/health>.