

Media Release



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From: Tazewell County Health Department
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For Immediate Release

TICK RELATED DISEASES IN TAZEWELL COUNTY

The Tazewell County Health Department (TCHD) has received reports of confirmed cases of Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever and Lyme Disease in two different Tazewell County residents. These cases were reported to TCHD late last week, May 13 & 14, 2021.

Rocky Mountain spotted fever (RMSF) is a tickborne disease caused by the bacterium *Rickettsia rickettsii*. This organism may cause potentially fatal human illness in North and South America and is transmitted to humans by the bite of infected tick species. In the United States, these include the American dog tick, Rocky Mountain wood tick, and brown dog tick. The ticks, sometimes no bigger than a pin head, become active and can spread disease any time of the year. Peak months for tickborne diseases are April through September. Ticks live in and near wooded areas, tall grass and brush.

Typical symptoms of Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever include fever, severe headache, abdominal pain, vomiting, and muscle pain. A rash may also develop, but is often absent in the first few days, and in some patients, never develops. Rocky Mountain spotted fever can be a severe or even fatal illness if not treated in the first few days of symptoms.

Lyme disease is transmitted by the bite of an infected deer tick, which also is known as the black-legged tick. The size of a deer tick may range from the size of a pin head to a small apple seed.

Signs and symptoms of Lyme disease can vary greatly from one person to another. Symptoms also vary with the length of time a person has been infected. A ring-like red rash occurs in about 70 - 80 percent of cases and begins three days to 32 days after the bite of an infected tick. In the center, the rash usually clears and has been described as resembling a bull's-eye. Often this rash is accompanied by one or more nonspecific symptoms: fatigue, chills and fever, headache, swollen lymph nodes, and joint and muscle pain. Oral antibiotics are usually used for treatment.

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“As the weather gets warmer and people spend more time outdoors, protection from tick bites is essential,” says Melissa Goetze, Director of Environmental Health. “Ticks can transmit a number of diseases through a bite. People should be very aware of prevention measures and use insect repellent when they are in areas where ticks may be present.”

The best way to protect against tickborne illnesses is to avoid tick bites by taking the following precautions:

- Apply insect repellent containing DEET (30 percent or less) to exposed skin (except the face). If you do cover up, use repellents for clothing containing DEET or permethrin to treat clothes (especially pants, socks and shoes) while in locations where ticks may be common. Follow label directions; do not misuse or overuse repellents. Permethrin repellents must be used on clothing only, not on skin.
- Ticks are usually found in ankle- to shin-high grass and weeds. Ticks cannot hop or fly. Walk in the center of trails so weeds do not brush against you.
- “Tick Checks” are an important method of preventing tickborne diseases. In areas where ticks may be present, be sure and check yourself, children and other family members every two to three hours for ticks.
- Bathe or shower as soon as possible after coming indoors (preferable within 2 hours) to wash off and more easily find ticks that are crawling on you.
- If you let your pets outdoors, check them often for ticks. Infected ticks also can transmit disease to them. (Check with your veterinarian about preventive measures against tickborne diseases.) You are at risk from ticks that “hitch a ride” on your pets, but fall off in your home before they feed.
- Remove any tick promptly. Do not try to burn the tick with a match or cover it with petroleum jelly or nail polish. Do not use bare hands. The best way to remove a tick is to grasp it with fine-point tweezers as close to the skin as possible and gently, but firmly, pull it straight out. Do not twist or jerk the tick. If tweezers are not available, grasp the tick with a piece of cloth or whatever can be used as a barrier between your fingers and the tick. You may want to put the tick in a jar of rubbing alcohol labeled with the date and location of the bite in case you seek medical attention and your physician wishes to have the tick identified.
- Wash the bite area and your hands thoroughly with soap and water; apply an antiseptic to the bite site.
- Keep your grass mowed and keep weeds cut around your home.
- Know the symptoms of tickborne disease and consult your physician if you have a fever and a rash or unexplained flu-like illness (without a cough) following a tick bite.

For more information about ticks, Lyme disease and Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever, visit the Illinois Department of Public Health’s Web site at www.idph.state.il.us or contact Environmental Health at the Tazewell County Health Department at 309-929-0272.

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For more information on public health issues, visit <http://www.tazewellhealth.org>

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