



## FACT SHEET

### Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever

**Cause:** Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever is a rickettsial disease caused by the organism, *Rickettsia rickettsii*. It is transmitted by the bite of an infected tick and results in a systemic, febrile illness.

**Symptoms:** Symptoms of Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever include the sudden onset of a moderate to high fever (which can last two to three weeks if untreated), muscle pain, severe headache, and chills. A rash occurs in about half of the cases. It starts with the extremities and soon spreads to the palms of the hands and soles of the feet, then quickly spreads to the trunk and rest of the body.

**Spread:** Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever is spread through the bite of an infected tick. Several ticks are responsible for the spread of this disease, and these vary by geographic region. The dog tick, *Dermacentor variabilis*, is the most common reservoir for this organism in Nebraska. Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever is not directly transmitted from person to person.

**Incubation:** The organism becomes infectious after the tick has been attached to the skin for at least four to six hours. It can also be transmitted in the process of tick removal if the tick becomes crushed, allowing infectious material to escape. Incubation is from 3 to 14 days.

### Contagious

**Period:** It is not directly transmitted from person to person. The tick remains infective for life, commonly as long as 18 months.

**Precautions:** Standard Precautions.

### Diagnosis and

**Treatment:** Lab test and cultures will confirm the diagnosis. Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever is treated by daily oral or intravenous doses of tetracyclines (usually doxycycline) for five to seven days and for at least 48 hours after an infected person is afebrile (without a fever). Treatment should be initiated (unless tetracyclines are contraindicated) on clinical and epidemiological considerations without waiting on laboratory confirmation of the diagnosis.

**Prevention:** When in tick infested areas:

- Frequently check clothing, skin, and animals.
- Wear proper clothing.
- Use tick repellents.
- Remove ticks as soon as they are noticed.

**How should a tick be removed?**

To remove an attached tick, grasp the tick by its head as close as possible to the attachment site with tweezers or forceps. Pull the tick upward and out with firm and steady pressure. If tweezers are not available, use fingers shielded with tissue paper or rubber gloves. Do not twist the tick out or apply petroleum jelly, a hot match, alcohol, or any other irritant to the tick in an attempt to get it to back out. Do not handle the tick with bare hands.

Be careful not to squeeze, crush or puncture the body of a tick which may contain infectious fluids. After removing the tick, thoroughly disinfect the bite site and wash hands. See a doctor if there is a concern about incomplete tick removal. It is important that a tick be removed as soon as possible.