

Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Case of Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever Identified

Coldwater, MI. The Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency was notified today by the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) of a case of Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever (RMSF). The case occurred in a child residing in neighboring Cass County. This is the first confirmed contracted case of the disease in Michigan since 2009.

According to Rebecca Burns, Health Officer for the tri-county health department, “Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever (RMSF) is a very serious bacterial infection, which can be fatal in the first eight days of symptoms, if not treated correctly.” Symptoms of RMSF include:

- Rash
- Sudden onset of moderate to high fever
- Abdominal pain (may mimic appendicitis or other causes of acute abdominal pain)
- Muscle pain
- Severe headache
- Eyes may become red
- Vomiting
- Lack of appetite
- Fatigue

The rash that makes RMSF a ‘spotted’ fever may begin anytime between 1 to 10 days after the fever and headache start, but it most often appears in the second to fifth day. The rash looks



Example of an early-stage rash in a RMSF patient.

like small red spots or blotches that begin on the wrists, ankles, palms and soles. It spreads to the arms and legs, toward the trunk, but usually skips the face. As the RMSF infection progresses, the original red spots may change in appearance to look more like bruises or bloody patches under the skin. She goes on to add “Because the symptoms associated with

the disease often times resemble other diseases, a blood test may be needed to confirm a diagnosis.”

RMSF is only one of four tick diseases for which outdoor enthusiasts and/or pet owners should be concerned. Other tick borne diseases are: Lyme Disease, Tularemia and Human Ehrlichiosis. All of these diseases, including RMSF, are treatable with antibiotics. It’s important to treat during the early stages and to follow your health care provider’s instructions.

Of course, prevention is also key to avoid contracting the disease. The health department recommends the following suggestions for preventing RMSF:

- Avoid wooded areas with dense shrubs and leaf litter, where ticks like to hide. Make your yard less attractive to ticks by mowing lawns and trimming trees.
- Wear solid, light-colored clothing. This will make it easier to find a tick on your clothes.
- Tuck your pants into your socks and wear a long-sleeved shirt. This will help prevent a tick from attaching to your skin.
- Use insect repellents. There are two types of repellents effective for ticks. Repellents that contain DEET (20% to 30%) can be used on clothing and exposed skin. The other type of repellent contains permethrin and should ONLY be used on clothing. Always read and follow label directions carefully. Also, use tick prevention products on your pets.
- Check yourself and your pets for ticks frequently when you are in tick-infested areas. Check again after returning and again before going to bed. Don’t overlook some of ticks’ favorite hiding places – on the scalp, behind the ears, under the arms, on the ankles, and in the groin.
- Bathe or shower as soon as possible after coming indoors (preferably within two hours) to wash off and more easily find ticks that are crawling on you. Ticks can get a ride indoors on your clothes. After being outdoors, dry clothing should be tumble dried in a dryer on high heat for 10 minutes to kill ticks. If the clothes are damp, additional time may be needed. If the clothes require washing first, hot water is recommended. The clothes should be warm and completely dry when finished.

If during a tick check you find a tick, be careful to remove it, using the following steps:

- Grasp with tweezers or forceps as close as possible to attachment (skin) site, and pull upward and out with a firm and steady pressure.
- If tweezers are not available, use fingers shielded with tissue paper or rubber gloves. Do not handle with bare hands.
- Be careful not to squeeze, crush or puncture the body of the tick, because it may contain infectious fluids.

- After removing the tick, thoroughly disinfect the bite site and wash hands. See or call health care professional if there is a concern about incomplete tick removal.

Remember that it is important that a tick be removed as soon as it is discovered. To learn more about RMSF Disease, the health department has published a Frequently Asked Question Sheet on its website at www.bhsj.org.

To learn more about how to protect your family's health, visit the Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency's website at www.bhsj.org. To receive family friendly tips and recipes that support healthy eating, like us on Facebook at: <https://www.facebook.com/bhsjwic>.

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