

Public Health Alert

DHHS Confirms First N.C. Death from Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever Since 2009

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Raleigh, N.C. - The N.C. Department of Health and Human Services announced today that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has confirmed a Buncombe County child's death in early June was the result of Rocky Mountain spotted fever (RMSF). This represents the first confirmed death due to RMSF in North Carolina since 2009. While deaths from this tick-borne disease are rare, RMSF is the most commonly reported tick-borne illness in the state.

In 2012, there were a total of 598 probable and laboratory-confirmed cases of RMSF reported from 78 counties across the state. For the five-year period from 2008-2012, a cumulative total of 2,044 cases were reported from 93 counties. North Carolina and Oklahoma are the states with the highest numbers of reported RMSF cases relative to their population each year.

"This death is a tragic reminder that ticks in our state can carry dangerous and potentially fatal diseases," said State Health Director Laura Gerald. "Transmission of RMSF from a tick can happen quickly after a bite, so the best way to prevent any tick-borne illness is to limit the opportunity for exposure."

RMSF is caused by infection with the bacterial organism *Rickettsia rickettsii*, and is transmitted by the bite of an infected American dog tick (*Dermacentor variabilis*). Persons typically become ill within 3-14 days following the bite of an infected tick. Among tick-borne diseases in the United States, RMSF has one of the highest risks of death. While the disease can usually be treated with antibiotics, 3 to 5 percent of cases reported in the United States in recent years have been fatal.

According to the CDC, key symptoms of RMSF are fever, muscle pain, headache and rash. Nationally, up to 20 percent of reported cases become ill enough to be hospitalized. Some early symptoms, such as fever and muscle pain, are similar to those of the flu.

You can limit your exposure to ticks by:

- Using personal protective measures for you and your children prior to going outside
- Treat your clothing with permethrin
- Apply DEET to skin per manufacturer's recommendations
- Modifying your yard to reduce tick populations
- Treating your pet to limit tick attachment, and check for ticks regularly

- After outdoor activities, thoroughly checking yourself and your children for ticks, especially in the hair.
- Properly removing attached ticks

While it is possible to be bitten by a tick and not know it, most tick bites can be detected. If you are bitten, quick removal of the tick can reduce the chance of infection. For information on how to remove a tick safely, visit http://www.cdc.gov/ticks/removing_a_tick.html It is a good idea to note the date you removed the tick. If you develop symptoms, this could be important information to share with your doctor.

For more information about tick-borne illness see the Public Health websites at <http://epi.publichealth.nc.gov/cd/diseases/rmsf.html>. For information about the use of DEET on children, see <http://www.healthychildren.org/English/safety-prevention/at-play/Pages/Insect-Repellents.aspx>
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