



Panhandle Health District

Healthy People in Healthy Communities

Public Health
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Panhandle Health District

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever

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Panhandle Health District

With so much focus on COVID-19 and the havoc it is wreaking across the world, it is easy to forget about other diseases and illnesses afflicting our population. Heading into spring with the sunny weather coaxing us all outdoors, there is a disease we want everyone to be aware of.

Rocky Mountain spotted fever (RMSF) is a bacterial disease spread through the bite of an infected tick. Most people with RMSF will have a fever, headache, and rash. RMSF can be deadly if not treated early with the right antibiotic. Several species of ticks in the United States can spread RMSF, including the American dog tick, Rocky Mountain wood tick, and the brown dog tick. The Rocky Mountain wood tick is what you would likely find in our area.

“In the Panhandle area, we’ve had 6 cases of RMSF in the past two years,” said Dave Hylsky, Panhandle Health District epidemiologist. “Those numbers may seem small, but when we look at the damage one of these tick bites can cause we want everyone to take every precaution.”

Although RMSF does not result in chronic or persistent infections, some people who recover from severe RMSF may be left with permanent damage. Severe RMSF can result in amputation of legs, arms, fingers or toes. The disease can cause hearing loss, paralysis, inflammation of the brain, kidney failure, mental disability, or even death. According to the CDC, in the U.S. people over the age of 40 years account for the highest number of reported cases, however, children under 10 years old represent the highest number of reported deaths.

“The damage can be devastating to families,” said Hylsky. “If you develop a fever or rash after being bitten by a tick or spending time in areas with ticks, call your healthcare provider immediately. RMSF is treatable, but treatment needs to happen quickly.”

RMSF can be difficult to diagnose as the symptoms are similar to many other illnesses. Protection is your best prevention. Check for ticks on people and pets every day, wear insect

repellant, and treat pets for ticks. While enjoying the outdoors where ticks tend to live, experts recommend wearing tick repellent and long-sleeved pants and sleeves. Homeowners should keep grass cut low and ensure weeds and woodpiles are removed. Ticks tend to live in grassy, brushy, or wooded areas, or even on our furry friends, so spending time outside camping, gardening, or hunting will bring you in close contact with ticks.

If a tick is found on the body, use fine-tipped tweezers to grasp it as close to the skin's surface as possible. Then, pull upward with steady, even pressure and avoid twisting or jerking the tick as this can cause the mouthparts to break off and remain in the skin. Once the tick is removed, thoroughly clean the bite site with soap and water or rubbing alcohol. Never crush a tick with your fingers. Then, flush the tick down the toilet or put it in alcohol, place it in a sealed bag/container, and wrap it tightly in tape before disposing in a closed garbage bin. If you develop a rash, headaches, pains or fever, call a doctor immediately.

“There are some wrong ways to treat a tick bite or try to remove a tick,” said Hylsky. “Please follow the guidance we’ve stated here. The goal is to remove the tick as quickly as possible – don’t wait for it to detach on its own.”

RMSF Signs and symptoms can include:

- Fever
- Headache
- Rash
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Stomach pain
- Muscle pain
- Lack of appetite

Check these parts of your body and your child’s body for ticks:

- Under the arms
- In and around the ears
- Inside belly button
- Back of the knees
- In and around the hair
- Between the legs
- Around the waist

Kootenai Health and the Panhandle Health District are actively working to share information about COVID-19 with our community. You can find the latest updates and ways to protect yourself at [cdc.gov/covid19](https://www.cdc.gov/covid19). If you have questions about COVID-19 or think you may have the virus, call the Panhandle Health District COVID-19 hotline at 1-877-415-5225.

Sources: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Environmental Health Association, Mayo Clinic

Panhandle Health District provides over 40 different public health programs to families, individuals and organizations in northern Idaho. From food and drinking water safety to health education and disease control, public health services are critical to ensure our community is a safe and healthy place to live, work and play.

The PHD team is made up of nurses, nutritionists, environmental health specialists, health educators and many other dedicated professionals with a common goal to deliver vital public health services.

Panhandle Health District is one of seven health districts in the state of Idaho.

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