## News from the Wyoming Department of Health

Thursday, May 16, 2013

## **Department: Avoid Ticks and the Diseases They Carry**

State residents should avoid ticks when enjoying activities or working outdoors during warmer weather because the insects can carry and pass on disease, according to the Wyoming Department of Health (WDH).

"May, June and July are typically the peak months for Wyoming's tick populations," said Emily Thorp, WDH surveillance epidemiologist. "Tick exposure is common when we walk through, play or sit in brushy and grassy areas or handle certain animals."

In Wyoming, diseases transmitted by infected ticks include tularemia, Rocky Mountain spotted fever (RMSF) and Colorado tick fever (CTF).

Tularemia symptoms can include fever, swollen and painful lymph glands, inflamed eyes, sore throat, mouth sores, skin ulcers and diarrhea. If the bacteria are inhaled, symptoms can include abrupt onset of fever, chills, headache, muscle aches, joint pain, dry cough and progressive weakness and pneumonia. Initial RMSF symptoms may include fever, nausea, vomiting, muscle pain, lack of appetite and severe headache. Later signs and symptoms may include rash, abdominal pain, joint pain and diarrhea. RMSF patients often require hospitalization. Colorado tick fever usually causes fever, headache, muscle and joint pain, and, occasionally, a rash.

One case of tularemia was reported to WDH in 2012; one case in 2011; and three in 2010, including one that was fatal. In 2012 there were two RMSF cases and one CTF case reported.

"Because these diseases can be quite serious, we suggest anyone who becomes ill after an insect or tick bite or after handling a sick or dead animal should contact a medical professional," Thorp said.

Tularemia, also known as "rabbit fever" or "deer fly fever," frequently affects rabbits, hares and rodents and has been associated with rabbit die-offs. People may acquire tularemia when bit by infected ticks, deer flies or horse flies. It can also be transmitted by handling infected animals, or through ingestion or contact with untreated, contaminated water or insufficiently cooked meat.

General recommendations to help avoid diseases passed on by ticks include:

- \* Wear light-colored clothing to make it easier to see ticks crawling on clothing.
- \* Tuck pant legs into socks.
- \* Apply insect repellents such as those containing 20 percent or more DEET and/or picaradin.
- \* Upon return from potentially tick-infested areas, search yourself and children for ticks and remove if found.
- \* Check pets for ticks; veterinarians can recommend tick control products.

Added precautions to help reduce tularemia risk include:

- \* Avoid bathing, swimming or working in untreated water and avoid drinking untreated water.
- \* Avoid handling rabbits, squirrels or other animals that appear sick.
- \* Wear rubber gloves when skinning animals, especially rabbits and squirrels; skin animals in a well-ventilated area.
- \* Wash hands thoroughly with soap and water after handling sick or dead animals.
- \* Cook meat thoroughly before eating, especially rabbit and squirrel.

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