



Custer County Health Department  
Creating a State of Health

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## Oklahomans Should Be Aware of Ticks, Diseases

A warm spring means Oklahomans are already enjoying outdoor activities, but a bite from a tick could quickly put a damper on the fun. The Oklahoma State Department of Health (OSDH) advises anyone who participates in outdoor activities, such as hiking, camping, bicycle trail riding, yard work and gardening, to follow tick bite prevention precautions.

Ticks can carry many diseases which can cause illness, and even death, in both children and adults of all ages. Oklahoma continues to rank among those states with the highest rate of three types of tickborne illness in the U.S. each year. These diseases include Rocky Mountain spotted fever (RMSF), ehrlichiosis and tularemia. Oklahomans are at highest risk of tickborne illness from May to August when ticks are most active.

Since 2012, there have been approximately 2,000 cases of RMSF, ehrlichiosis, and tularemia among Oklahoma residents. Cases have ranged from 2 to 92 years of age; 11 percent of cases were hospitalized due to their illness. It is important to recognize the early symptoms and seek care as these diseases can be fatal if not diagnosed and treated early. In the past five years, four Oklahomans (two adults and two children) died due to tickborne diseases.

The symptoms of a tickborne illness may include fever, chills, muscle aches, vomiting and fatigue. Other symptoms may include a skin rash or painful swelling of lymph nodes near the bite. Symptoms of illness typically occur 3-14 days following a tick bite. Most tickborne diseases can be treated successfully with early diagnosis and appropriate antibiotics, so it is important to seek medical attention if a fever and other signs of illness are noticed within 14 days of a bite or being in an area where ticks are lurking.

The OSDH advises those who participate in hiking, camping, bicycle trail riding, yard work, gardening and other outdoor activities to prevent tick bites by following the tips below:

- Wear light-colored clothing to make ticks easier to see.
- Wear long-sleeved shirts and long pants tucked into socks to prevent ticks from attaching.
- Wear closed-toe shoes, not sandals.
- Hikers and bikers should stay in the center of trails to avoid grass and brush.
- Check for ticks at least once per day, particularly along waistbands, the hairline and back of the neck, in the armpits and in the groin area.
- Remove attached ticks as soon as possible using tweezers or fingers covered with a tissue.
- Use an insect repellent containing 20 percent or more DEET, picaridin, or IR3535 on exposed skin for protection which lasts several hours.
- Use products containing 0.5 percent permethrin only on clothing and gear, such as boots, pants and tents. Permethrin should not be used on the body.
- Check with a veterinarian about tick control for pets. Dogs and cats can get tickborne illnesses too, and they are a vehicle for bringing ticks into a home if not on a tick-preventive regimen.

For more information, visit <https://go.usa.gov/x5thh>.

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