



COLORADO ACADEMY OF FAMILY PHYSICIANS

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Living Healthy: Ticks in Colorado

It's time to start packing up those skis and break out the hiking boots. What a great way to enjoy Colorado's mountains once the snow melts away. So while you are out there exploring the peaks and high country, it is important to remember that you are not alone. Yes that's right....it is the season for ticks.

The Culprit

Ticks are most prevalent during the spring and summer months. Two of the most common ticks found in Colorado are the Rocky Mountain wood tick and the American dog tick. Ticks are not only blood sucking parasites but they can carry diseases that infect rodents, deer, dogs and of course humans. There are a variety of important diseases that ticks transmit and some are even more important to Coloradans.

The Threat

Rocky Mountain spotted fever, despite its name, is very rare in Colorado and is much more of an issue in the Eastern parts of the U.S. Lyme disease is even rarer. Tularemia is a bacterial infection that is transmitted by both the Rocky Mountain wood tick and the American dog tick. However, it is more commonly transmitted to wild animals such as rabbits and can then infect humans via an alternative host. In rare instances a tick will remain attached to its host and cause a transient paralysis. The paralysis is completely reversible with removal of the tick. The most common infection in Colorado bears its' name – Colorado fever.

The Fever

Colorado fever is a viral infection that occurs about 3-6 days after a bite from the wood tick. Most cases of Colorado fever occur between the months of March and July. The most common symptom is a fever that lasts 3 days, resolves and then may return 1-3 days later for several more days. Additional symptoms may include:

- Generalized weakness
- Headache behind the eyes
- Muscle aches
- Nausea and vomiting
- Rash
- Sensitivity to light
- Skin pain
- Sweating

Colorado fever typically resolves on its own, however on rare occasions it has caused serious complications such as aseptic meningitis, encephalitis, and hemorrhagic fever. Much more commonly the only treatment necessary is tincture of time and perhaps pain relievers such as acetaminophen or ibuprofen. Symptom control is the mainstay.

The Fix

So you have a tick, how do you get it out? The recommended technique is to use tweezers, forceps or your fingers and gently pull the tick out. Be careful not to burst the tick and try to pull straight out in order to prevent leaving part of the tick in the skin. Once removed, use a topical antiseptic on the bite area.

The Better Fix

The other strategy is to prevent ticks all together. So if you are going out to enjoy Colorado take these few tips to keep the bloodsuckers away.

- Wear a long-sleeve shirt, and tuck the shirt into the pants
- Tuck the pant legs into the socks
- Wear light-colored clothing – this helps detect darker colored ticks for rapid removal
- Perform daily tick checks
- Insect repellent may be helpful – best to apply to clothing

Now that you have the scoop, get out there and enjoy beautiful Colorado!

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This information is provided as a public service by the Colorado Academy of Family Physicians. For information about prevention and wellness, visit the American Academy of Family Physicians consumer website at www.familydoctor.org