



EHRlichiosis

What is ehrlichiosis?

Ehrlichiosis is a tickborne disease caused by three types of the bacteria *Ehrlichiae*. Ehrlichiosis can be a severe illness, especially if untreated. Severe manifestations of the disease may include prolonged fever (more than 100 degrees F; 37.8 degrees C), renal failure, blood disorders, central nervous system disorders, breathing problems, seizures, or coma.

Who gets ehrlichiosis?

Although anyone can get ehrlichiosis, the majority of known cases have been adults. People who spend time outdoors in tick-infested areas from April until October are at greatest risk for exposure. Most cases of Ehrlichiosis peak in June and July.

How is ehrlichiosis spread?

Ehrlichiosis is transmitted by the bite of infected ticks, including the blacklegged tick (deer tick), *Dermacentor variabilis* (dog tick), and the Lone Star tick. Ehrlichiosis is not spread from person to person.

What are the symptoms of ehrlichiosis?

The most common symptoms are fever, muscle aches, weakness, and headache. Patients may also experience confusion, nausea, vomiting and joint pain. Unlike Lyme disease or Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever, a rash is possible but not as common.

How soon do symptoms appear?

Symptoms usually begin one to three weeks after exposure to an infected tick. It is possible that many infected persons develop an illness so mild that they do not seek medical attention.

Should an infected person be excluded from work or school?

No exclusions from work or school are necessary for people infected with ehrlichiosis because there is no person-to-person transmission.

What is the treatment for ehrlichiosis?

Antibiotics such as doxycycline or tetracyclines are usually effective in treating ehrlichiosis. Treatment should be considered if ehrlichiosis is suspected because delayed treatment may increase the risk for adverse outcomes.



What can a person or community do to prevent the spread of ehrlichiosis?

Limiting exposure to ticks reduces the likelihood of infection. In persons exposed to tick-infested habitats, follow these recommendations to avoid disease:

- After coming indoors, promptly and carefully inspect your body and clothes for ticks and remove any attached ticks. It may take several hours of attachment before microorganisms are transmitted from the tick to the person.
- Wear light-colored clothing when outdoors in tick-infested habitats.
- Tuck pants legs into socks so ticks cannot crawl up the inside of the pants.
- Treat clothing and gear with products containing 0.5% permethrin. Permethrin can be used to treat boots, clothing, and camping gear and it remains protective through several washings. Alternatively, you can buy permethrin-treated clothing and gear.
- Use Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)-registered insect repellents containing DEET, picaridin, IR3535, Oil of Lemon Eucalyptus (OLE), para-menthane-diol (PMD), or 2-undecanone.
- Frequently mow lawns, meadow trails, and outside fences to reduce tick populations. Stay on trails without tall grasses or brush piles. Ticks crawl on the tips of grasses and shrubs and then crawl on people and animals when they brush against the vegetation.
- Shower immediately after being outdoors.
- Treat cats and dogs with a tick preventive medicine recommended by veterinarians.

Remove a tick from your skin using the following steps:

- Grasp the tick with tweezers or forceps as close as possible to the attachment (skin) site and pull upward and out with firm and steady pressure. If tweezers are not available, use fingers shielded with tissue paper or rubber gloves.
- Do not handle ticks with bare hands. Be careful not to squeeze, crush, or puncture the body of the tick as it may contain infectious fluids.
- After removing the tick, thoroughly disinfect the bite area and wash your hands.
- Consult a physician if there is concern about incomplete tick removal. It is important that a tick be completely removed as soon as it is discovered.

Resources

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, <https://www.cdc.gov/ehrlichiosis/index.html>

Office of Infectious Disease Epidemiology
24/7 Emergency Contact Number: 1-888-295-5156

Revised: 01/2023

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