

Fact sheet

Colorado tick fever

What is Colorado tick fever?

Colorado tick fever (CTF) is a rare viral illness that is caused by the CTF virus.

How is Colorado tick fever spread?

It is spread by the bite of the Rocky Mountain wood tick. Rocky mountain wood ticks are found in the western United States and western Canada at 4,000–10,000 feet above sea level.

The virus is not spread from person to person, except in rare instances by blood transfusion. Small rodents such as squirrels, chipmunks, and mice can become infected with the CTF virus through tick bites. These animals usually do not become ill, but they can pass the virus to other ticks that feed on them.

What are the signs and symptoms of Colorado tick fever?

The most common symptoms of Colorado tick fever are fever, chills, headache, body aches, and feeling tired. Some patients have sore throat, vomiting, abdominal pain, or skin rash.

About half of patients have a “biphasic” fever. This means they have several days of fever, feel better for several days, and then have a second short period of fever and illness. Most people who become ill have mild disease and recover completely. However, weakness and fatigue may last several weeks.

How long after infection do symptoms appear?

The incubation period (time from tick bite to onset of illness) ranges from about 1 to 14 days.

Who is most at risk?

Anyone bitten by a tick in an area where the virus is circulating can get infected with CTF virus. People who work outdoors or participate in outdoor activities are most likely to be exposed to ticks. Most cases of CTF occur during spring or summer months when ticks are most active.

What type of health problems are caused by Colorado tick fever?

In rare cases, some patients may develop more severe illness that affects the central nervous system with symptoms that include stiff neck and confusion. Life-threatening illnesses or deaths due to CTF virus are rare.

How is Colorado tick fever diagnosed?

Your healthcare provider will examine you and ask about your signs and symptoms. Early diagnosis is based on a patient's symptoms and history of probable exposure to a tick in an area where CTF occurs. Blood tests may be ordered. Antibody tests can be done to confirm the infection.

How is Colorado tick fever treated?

There are no medications to treat CTF virus infection. Persons with severe CTF illnesses may need to be hospitalized. Treatment may include intravenous fluids and medications to reduce pain and fever.

People who have CTF should not donate blood or bone marrow for six months after their illness. The virus may stay in the blood for several months and can be passed to others by blood transfusion or bone marrow transplant.

How can Colorado tick fever be prevented?

There is no vaccine or medicine to prevent Colorado tick fever. The best way to prevent illness is to reduce your risk of tick bites:

- Use insect repellent.
- Wear long sleeves and pants.
- Avoid wooded and bushy areas with high grass.
- Examine gear and pets.
- Shower soon after being outdoors.
- Thoroughly check for ticks after spending time outdoors.
 - Under the arms
 - In and around the ears
 - Inside belly button
 - Back of the knees
 - In and around the hair
 - Between the legs

Where can I get more information?

- Your personal healthcare provider
- Your [local health department](#)
- [Utah Department of Health and Human Services](#)
- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#)
- [Tick removal](#)