

PUBLIC HEALTH FACT SHEET

Ehrlichiosis



Burlington County Health Department

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Public Health
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Burlington County Health Department
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What is ehrlichiosis?

Ehrlichiosis [*ur-lik-ee-oh-sis*] is the name used for several bacterial infections caused by the bite of an infected tick.

Who gets ehrlichiosis?

Anyone can get ehrlichiosis, although most cases are in adults. People who spend time outdoors in areas known to have a lot of ticks are at greatest risk for getting ehrlichiosis. New Jersey does have some of the highest number of new cases per year; however, only 3-26 cases out of 1 million are found in this state.

How is ehrlichiosis spread?

Ehrlichiosis is spread by the bite of infected ticks, including deer ticks and lone star ticks. Ehrlichiosis cannot be spread from person to person, so it is not necessary to avoid someone who has it

What are the symptoms of ehrlichiosis?

Early symptoms of ehrlichiosis include fever, headache, muscle aches, and weakness. Some people may also have nausea, vomiting, and a skin rash. It is usually a mild illness, but can become severe in some cases. Symptoms resemble those of various other infections and non-infectious diseases so it is important to see your doctor whenever you have these symptoms.

Symptoms can start anywhere from 1 to 3 weeks after a bite from an infected tick. Not all tick bites will result in infection. It appears that if a tick is removed within 24 to 48 hours of attachment, most people will not become infected with ehrlichiosis. Not all people infected with the bacteria will show symptoms.

What is the treatment for ehrlichiosis?

Ehrlichiosis can be treated with antibiotics. Treatment should begin once ehrlichiosis is suspected, as this prevents severe complications from developing. It is very important to finish all the antibiotics, even if you feel better. Not finishing them can result in the infection not completely going away and becoming more difficult to treat.

How can ehrlichiosis be prevented?

The best prevention is to avoid tick bites. Deer ticks are often found near the ground in brushy, wooded or high grassy areas. Ticks are most active during the months of April through September. If you live in or visit an area likely to have deer ticks, take the following protections:

- Wear a long-sleeved shirt and long pants, and tuck your pant legs tightly into your socks. (Light colors will help you spot the ticks on your clothes before they reach your skin.)
- Stay to the middle of paths when walking or hiking.
- On exposed skin use a repellent that contains the active ingredient DEET

- Talk to your veterinarian about the best way to protect your pets against ticks.
- Check yourself, your children, and your pets for ticks every day. Remember deer ticks, especially young ones, are only the size of a poppy seed. Their favorite places to bite and attach are on the legs, in the groin, in the armpits, along the hairline, and in or behind the ears.
- Remove any ticks promptly using fine point tweezers. Do not use your bare fingers to remove a tick. Grasp the tick as close to the skin as possible and, without squeezing or twisting, pull the tick straight out with steady pressure. Once removed, disinfect the area with rubbing alcohol.
- Know the symptoms of Ehrlichiosis. If you have been someplace likely to have ticks between April and September and you develop Ehrlichiosis symptoms, see a doctor right away.

Where can you get more information?

- Your doctor, nurse or clinic
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website at: <http://www.cdc.gov/>
- The Burlington County Department of Health at (609)-265-5548 or <http://www.co.burlington.nj.us/departments/health>
- The New Jersey Department of Health (NJDoH) at (609) 292-9560 or on the NJDoH website at <http://www.nj.gov/health>