



Kiowa County Health Department

For Immediate Release

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It's Tick Time! Prevent Tickborne Diseases

A warm spring and the onset of summer means Oklahomans are enjoying outdoor activities. But a bite from a tick could quickly put a damper on the fun. Ticks can carry significant diseases. The Oklahoma State Department of Health (OSDH) reports that each year, Oklahoma ranks among those states with the highest number of cases of Rocky Mountain spotted fever as well as other tickborne illnesses such as ehrlichiosis and tularemia.

In 2013, there were 368 cases of these tickborne diseases reported among Oklahoma residents, including 42 that required hospitalization for their illness. Thus far in 2014, 34 cases of tickborne diseases have been reported to the OSDH, with two individuals hospitalized.

In addition to the tickborne diseases that occur annually, Oklahoma's first confirmed case and death of Heartland virus was recently identified in a Delaware County resident. The Oklahoma resident was the tenth person nationwide confirmed with the virus and the second person to die from it.

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 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 tick bite or being in an area where ticks are lurking.

The OSDH advises persons 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 deprive ticks of attachment sites.
- 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, hairline and back of neck, in the armpits and groin area. Remove attached ticks as soon as possible using tweezers or fingers covered with a tissue.
- Use an insect repellent containing DEET on skin and clothing according to directions. (Insect repellent with permethrin should be used on clothing only and according to directions.)
- Check with your veterinarian about tick control for your pets! Dogs and cats can get tickborne illnesses too, and they are a traveling tick parade, bringing ticks into your home if not on a tick preventive regimen.

For more information, contact the Kiowa County Health Department at 580-726-3316 or visit <http://ads.health.ok.gov> and click on "Disease Information" then "Tickborne and Mosquitoborne Diseases."