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Local health officials issue tick-borne disease advisory

The Sarasota County Health Department is issuing a tick-borne disease advisory in response to the identification of an individual who acquired Rocky Mountain spotted fever locally. Health officials say that tick-borne illnesses, such as Rocky Mountain spotted fever (RMSF) and Lyme disease, are present year round throughout Florida. Symptoms of RMSF typically begin five to 10 days after a tick bite. Symptoms can initially include fever, headache, vomiting, muscle aches, lack of appetite, and a mild rash that may appear two to five days after the onset of symptoms. Later signs include stomach pain, joint pain and diarrhea. The characteristic spotted red rash may appear on the third day or later after the onset of symptoms.

Preventing tick bites is the best way to reduce the risk of tick-borne disease. Ticks are present in a variety of environments, but are commonly found in wooded or leafy areas. Depending on the species and the stage of the life cycle, many ticks can be difficult to see. Fortunately, simple steps can be taken to help prevent tick bites.

- [Prevent tick infestations around your home](#) using landscaping techniques to create a tick-free zone.
- Walk in the center of a trail to avoid contact with vegetation in tick-infested areas.
- Discourage deer and prevent ticks on dogs and cats by using tick medicine or a tick collar. Be sure to follow package directions and maintain your pet under the care of a veterinarian.
- Use repellent with DEET for skin or clothing or pyrethrins for use on clothing.
- Wear white or light-colored clothing so you can see if ticks are crawling on clothing.
- Tuck pant legs into socks so ticks cannot crawl up the inside of your pants.

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PAGE TWO – Tick-borne disease advisory

- Check your body and your child's body for ticks after spending time in an area where ticks may be present. Use a hand-held or full-length mirror to check the entire body. Pay special attention to feet and legs as some ticks are small enough to crawl through socks and into shoes. If you find any ticks, remove them immediately.
- Remove ticks promptly. The longer an infected tick is attached, the greater the chance that it will transmit disease. Use fine tweezers or notched extractor, pull straight up, and avoid petroleum jelly or heat.

After removing the tick, disinfect the bite site and wash hands thoroughly with soap and water. You may wish to save the tick for identification in case you become ill two to three weeks after the bite. To do so, place the tick in a sealed plastic bag, write the date of the bite on a piece of paper in pencil and place it in the bag, then put the bag in the freezer.

For more information, call the Sarasota County Health Department at 941-861-2900, or visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Web site:
<http://www.cdc.gov/ticks/prevention.html>.

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