



Indiana State
Department of Health

Epidemiology
Resource
Center

Quick Facts

About Ehrlichiosis

What is Ehrlichiosis?

Ehrlichiosis is a disease caused by several bacteria that can infect animals and people. Ehrlichiosis has been known to sicken animals for many years, but infections of people have only been recognized in the last 15-20 years. Two types of these bacteria, *Ehrlichia chaffeensis* and *Ehrlichia phagocytophila*, are known to infect people in Indiana.

How is ehrlichiosis spread?

Ehrlichiosis is spread by the bite of either the Lonestar tick or the deer tick. Ticks acquire bacteria by biting small, wild rodents or deer. The tick injects the bacteria into either the animal host or human host as it bites and engorges on blood.

Who is at risk for ehrlichiosis?

Anyone who engages in outdoor activities where there are ticks.

What are the symptoms of ehrlichiosis?

Some individuals may not become ill or only have very mild symptoms; others may have very severe illness. Usually symptoms appear 5-10 days after the tick has taken a blood meal and fallen from the host. Symptoms may include fever,

headache, fatigue, and muscle aches. Nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, cough, joint pains, confusion, and sometimes a rash may also be present.

How do I know if I have ehrlichiosis?

You cannot tell without seeing your health care provider. Your health care provider will complete a thorough physical examination and laboratory testing to confirm whether or not you have ehrlichiosis.

How can ehrlichiosis be treated?

Ehrlichiosis can be treated with appropriate antibiotics, usually a tetracycline antibiotic or doxycycline, but others may be used depending on the patient's age or other health status. A health care provider will decide which antibiotic to use and prescribe it appropriately.

How is ehrlichiosis prevented?

Preventing the attachment and feeding of ticks through personal protection measures can prevent ehrlichiosis.

- Walk on cleared trails and stay in the center of the trail.
- Minimize contact with leaf litter, brush, and overgrown grass.
- Wear light-colored long pants with cuffs tucked into sock and long sleeves when walking in grassy or wooded areas. It is easier to spot ticks on light-colored clothing.
- Put insect repellent containing DEET on clothing, socks, and shoes and exposed skin. Permethrin (Permanone) will keep ticks off clothes and shoes but should not be applied directly to skin.
- Check every 2 hours for ticks on clothes or exposed skin.
- After returning from the grassy or wooded area, brush off clothing and body. Inspect clothes and body for ticks, particularly in the areas of the groin, back of neck and knees, and armpits. Take a hot shower and wash clothing at a high temperature.

All information presented is intended for public use. For more information, please refer to:

<http://www.cdc.gov/ticks/diseases/ehrlichiosis/>

This page was last reviewed September 20, 2010.