

# What you should know about tick-borne diseases in Florida

## WHAT TO DO IF YOU FIND A TICK ATTACHED

**If you find a tick on you, remove it right away.** You should remove ticks with a pair of fine-tipped tweezers or a tick removal device. Grasp the tick as close to the surface of the skin as you can, and pull upward with a steady, even motion. Be careful not to squeeze or crush the tick. After removing the tick, clean the bite site and wash hands well with soap and water. Don't use petroleum jelly, a hot match, nail polish or other ways to remove ticks.

## IF YOU THINK YOU MAY HAVE A TICK-BORNE DISEASE

**Call your doctor right away if you think you may have a tick-borne disease.** Be sure to tell your doctor about any recent tick bites or if you have been in areas where ticks are likely to be found. For more information, visit [www.MyFloridaEH.com](http://www.MyFloridaEH.com) and click on Tick-borne Disease Information.



Lyme disease, Rocky Mountain spotted fever, ehrlichiosis (ER-LICK-EE-OH-SIS), and anaplasmosis (AN-UH-PLAZ-MOE-SIS) are diseases transmitted by bites from infected ticks. Avoiding tick bites is the best way to keep from getting ill.

Florida Department of Health  
Division of Environmental Health

## Lyme disease



Lyme disease is caused by a bacterium called *Borrelia burgdorferi*. In the south-eastern U.S. the black-legged tick transmits the disease. About 15–20 cases are reported each year in people who were exposed in Florida.

**SYMPTOMS:** Most people, though not all, will get a red “bull’s eye” rash three to 30 days after being bitten by an infected tick. This rash does not always appear at the site of the bite, and may occur on another part of the body. Other symptoms can include fever, headache, chills, fatigue, stiff neck or muscle aches. If you do not treat the infection, it can spread to joints, the heart and the nervous system.

## Rocky Mountain spotted fever

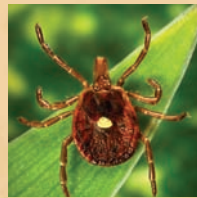


Rocky Mountain spotted fever (RMSF) is a serious disease caused by the bacterium *Rickettsia rickettsii*. The main type of tick that carries RMSF in this area is the American dog tick. About 10–15 cases are reported each year in people who were exposed in Florida.

**SYMPTOMS:** Symptoms usually begin 5 to 10 days after a tick bite, and can include fever, headache, vomiting, muscle aches, and lack of appetite. A rash may appear 2–5 days or longer after symptoms first begin. The rash

is often seen on the arms, legs, hands and feet, but not everyone who is infected will see a rash. Later signs include stomach pain, joint pain, and diarrhea. Three to five percent of cases may die from the disease.

## Ehrlichiosis/anaplasmosis



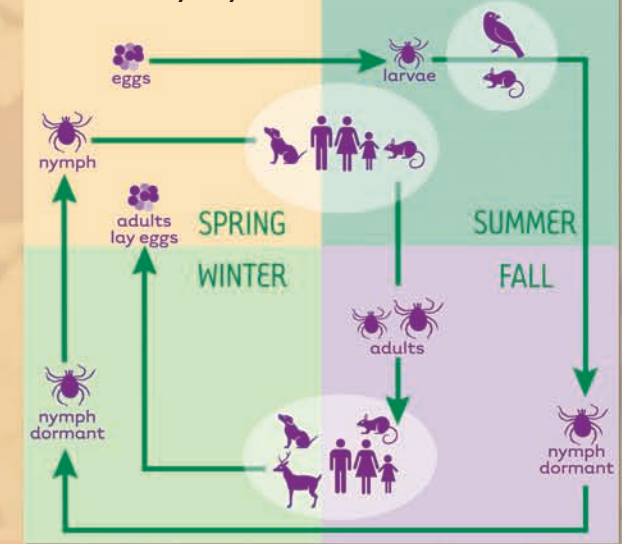
Ehrlichiosis and anaplasmosis are tick-borne diseases that infect blood cells. Ehrlichiosis is spread by the lone star tick. The black-legged tick carries anaplasmosis. Ehrlichiosis is more common in Florida. Each year there are about 15–25 cases in people who were exposed in Florida.

**SYMPTOMS:** Symptoms of both diseases usually begin 5 to 10 days after a tick bite, and can include fever, headache, fatigue, and muscle aches. Other signs include cough, nausea, vomiting, joint pain, diarrhea, and confusion. A rash can be present, but is not common.

## Other tick-borne diseases

Other tick-borne diseases may also be in Florida. If you have a tick bite and become ill, you should call your doctor.

## General Tick Life Cycle MAY VARY DEPENDING ON TICK SPECIES



**People treated with antibiotics early after becoming ill usually get better quickly.** Those who find out they have a tick-borne disease later on are more likely to have severe symptoms. People with severe illness caused by RMSF, ehrlichiosis, or anaplasmosis can die from the disease. If you are sick, you should tell your doctor about any recent tick bites or exposure to ticks or tick habitats. Fortunately, most tick bites do not make people ill. Treatment is not recommended unless a person starts to show signs of illness.

**Walk in the center of trails or paths to avoid touching plants in tick-infested areas.**

## WHAT YOU CAN DO TO PREVENT TICK-BORNE DISEASES

**At this time, there are no vaccines that prevent tick-borne diseases. Avoiding tick bites is the best way to reduce the risk of becoming ill. These simple steps can help prevent tick bites.**

➔ **Apply repellent** to help prevent ticks from attaching to your skin. EPA registered repellents containing DEET (N,N-diethyl-meta-toluamide, or N,N-diethyl-3-methylbenzamide), picaridin or IR3535 can give you several hours of protection. Repellents with permethrin can be used on clothing, shoes, tents and gear. You should not put permethrin directly on the skin. Always follow product instructions when applying repellent!

➔ **Dress so your skin is covered in white or light-colored clothing** when you are in an area where ticks might be present. This will help you see if any ticks are crawling on your clothes. Tuck your pants legs into your socks so that ticks cannot crawl up the inside of your pants.

➔ **Walk in the center of the trail or path** to avoid touching plants in tick-infested areas.

➔ **Check your body and your child’s body for ticks** after spending time in a place where ticks are likely to be found. Look carefully at your feet and legs, as some ticks are small enough to crawl into shoes and through socks.

➔ **Check your pets for ticks.** Talk to your veterinarian about products that keep ticks off your pets. Be sure to follow package directions and keep your pet under the care of a vet.

➔ **Prevent tick infestations around your home** by landscaping your yard to be a tick-free zone. For details on how you can control ticks around the home, visit <http://www.cdc.gov>.