



## Ehrlichiosis Fact Sheet

### **What is ehrlichiosis disease?**

Ehrlichiosis is a recently recognized infectious disease which affects people and animals and is caused by a bacterial micro-organism called Ehrlichia. In the United States, ehrlichiosis is mainly found in the southeastern and south central regions of the country. Two different forms of human ehrlichiosis are currently known to occur in the U.S. depending on the kind of white blood cell which is infected. Human monocytic ehrlichiosis (HME) is caused by *E. chaffeensis* and human granulocytic ehrlichiosis (HGE) is caused by a different Ehrlichia species as yet unnamed. Canine ehrlichiosis and “Potomac horse fever” are the most common animal illnesses caused by Ehrlichia agents, but it is not thought that this animal-related Ehrlichia cause human illness.

### **How is ehrlichiosis spread?**

Ehrlichiosis is acquired from the bite of an infected tick. The main tick vectors are *Amblyomma americanum* (“lone star tick”) and *Ixodes scapularis* (“black legged deer tick”). Ehrlichiosis cannot be spread from person to person or by direct contact with an infected animal.

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### **Who gets ehrlichiosis?**

All persons are susceptible to ehrlichiosis, but persons who spend long amounts of time outdoors are more likely to have exposure to infected ticks. Most cases of ehrlichiosis occur between the months of May and September.

### **What are the symptoms of ehrlichiosis?**

The early symptoms are “flu-like” in nature. They may include fever, headache, chills, loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting and muscle pain. Some persons (about 20%) will acquire a rash along with the “flu-like” symptoms. Adults with severe infection may develop a cough, diarrhea, enlarged lymph nodes, anemia, decreased platelets (thrombocytopenia) and decreased white blood cells (leukopenia).

### **How soon do symptoms appear?**

The “flu-like” symptoms and possibly the rash will occur about 7-21 days following a tick bite.

### **What is the treatment for ehrlichiosis?**

Tetracycline or doxycycline is the antibiotic treatment of choice.

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### **How can ehrlichiosis be prevented?**

The conventional methods of avoiding tick exposure and tick attachment are the only ways to protect oneself against ehrlichiosis. If you will be working or playing in grassy or wooded areas where ticks are present, light-colored clothing should be worn to visualize the ticks more readily. Preferably, a long sleeved shirt with long pants tucked into socks or boots should be worn. DEET tick repellents can be applied to the skin (with limited use on infants and small children) and permethrin can be applied to clothing. Always conduct frequent “tick checks” and remove any attached ticks as soon as possible. If a tick bite occurs, the date should be noted and your personal physician should be contacted if the person becomes ill.

For further information, contact the  
Oklahoma City-County Health  
Department (405) 425-4437

revised 04/2013

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