

What is tick paralysis?

Tick paralysis refers to acute onset of paralysis caused by a tick bite. The condition is primarily found in the Rocky Mountain and northwestern regions of the United States and is rare in Georgia. The number of cases per year is unknown because physicians are not required to report cases of tick paralysis to Public Health.

How is tick paralysis spread?

Tick paralysis results from a neurotoxin that is secreted in the saliva of certain ticks when they feed. The tick must be attached for several days. Person-to-person transmission of tick paralysis has not been documented.

Who gets tick paralysis?

Anyone who is bitten by a tick can get tick paralysis, but it most commonly affects children less than 10 years of age.

What are the symptoms of tick paralysis?

The symptoms of tick paralysis include weakness in the legs and arms, followed by paralysis beginning in the legs and moving upward. If unrecognized, tick paralysis may progress to respiratory failure and may be fatal in 10% of cases.

What is the treatment for tick paralysis?

Treatment for tick paralysis is simply removal of the tick. Once the tick is found and removed, the patient recovers fully, often within a matter of hours. It is often difficult to find the tick, which can be attached to the scalp and hidden in the hair.

What can be done to prevent the spread of tick paralysis?

There are no vaccines to prevent tick-borne disease, so limiting exposure to ticks is very important. When spending time outdoors in places where contact with ticks may occur, take the following precautions:

- Wear light-colored clothing so that crawling ticks can be easily seen.
- Wear pants and long sleeves to reduce skin exposure to ticks.
- Tuck pants into socks and shirts into pants to prevent ticks from crawling up pants legs.
- Apply insect repellent containing DEET to exposed skin, and permethrin to clothing.
- After spending time outdoors, thoroughly inspect your body for crawling or attached ticks.

How should a tick be removed?

To remove an attached tick, grasp with fine-tipped tweezers as close to the skin surface as possible, and pull upward and out with a firm, steady pressure. If tweezers are not available, use fingers shielded with tissue paper or rubber gloves. Do not handle with bare hands. Do not use petroleum jelly, fire, or other home remedies; these methods may actually increase the risk of infection. Be careful not to squeeze, crush, or puncture the tick's body, which may contain infectious fluids. After removing the tick, thoroughly disinfect the bite area and wash hands. Consult with a physician if there is concern about incomplete tick removal.

Where can I get additional information about tick paralysis?

Adapted from: CDC. Tick Paralysis—Washington, 1995. MMWR 1996; 45(16):325-6.