

## Ticks spreading rare disease through Virginia

Posted: Aug 07, 2009 6:12 PM EDT Updated: Aug 07, 2009 7:18 PM EDT

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RICHMOND, VA (WWBT) - Three strangers all needing a transfusion now have one more thing in common. They contracted Babesiosis from their blood donor, a Charlottesville man who was bit by a black-legged tick while hiking in either Virginia or Connecticut.

"Well it can be fatal especially to people who are immune compromised. People who have serious health issues. People die from it in the Northeast United States," said David Gaines with the Virginia Department of Health. "We just don't have any records of it here in Virginia, but we don't have anyone looking for it either."

The illness is so rare, in its 34 years of business; Virginia Blood Services has never had an issue with Babesiosis.

"Every year there are more than 10 million blood transfusions that take place. To date, only 70 people have contracted Babesiosis," said Brian Chandler, Virginia Blood Services.

The FDA doesn't even require blood banks to test for the illness. And unless you have poor health, you wouldn't know you had it either.

"It looks like a little, little bug just crawling up your leg. If it's embedded in you, it's a red area around where the bug is," said Michael Abbate.

Michael Abbate and his dog Oakley check for ticks on the daily.

"I put insect repellent on and he has tick medicine," said Abbate.

Once you've been bitten, the clock starts ticking. Doctors say it only takes about 36 hours for a tick to be attached before it injects you with Babesiosis or other illnesses like Lyme disease.

"Ticks are disgusting and the thought about a tick attaching itself and then giving you a disease that in some cases might be fatal worries us all," Dr. Charles Rula, Patient First Healthcare.

Doctor Charles Rula with Patient First says remove the tick immediately. If you're worried you may get sick, as gross as it is, take the tick to your doctor.

Babesiosis can be treated with antibiotics. The three people that were infected are expected to recover.

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