

Congo Fever: Deadly ticks carrying Ebola-like virus found in UK and Europe

Deadly ticks that carry an ebola-like virus have been found in the UK after spreading across Europe, health officials have warned.

The hyalomma tick was discovered in Dorset last year and was 10 times larger in size than average, as experts believe the blood-sucking parasites have mutated to survive the cold winters.



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'The next ebola'

Hyalomma ticks are usually only found in Africa, Asia and parts of southern Europe, but one was removed from a horse in Dorset last September and sent to Public Health England (PHE) for analysis.

Tests found the creature was carrying rickettsia spotted fever, which can cause headaches, cramps and blisters in humans, but ticks are also known to carry the deadly Crimean-Congo haemorrhagic fever virus, dubbed "the next ebola".

The deadly virus, also known as Congo fever, results in death in around two fifths of all cases and there are currently no proven vaccines available to prevent it.



High-risk areas include grassy and wooded spots in southern England, East Anglia, the Yorkshire Moors and the Scottish Highlands

According to the World Health Organisation, onset of symptoms is sudden, prompting fever, muscle aches, dizziness, neck pain and sore eyes.

Infected people may also suffer with nausea, diarrhoea, abdominal pain, sore throat and confusion early on, while severely ill patients can experience rapid kidney deterioration, liver failure and internal bleeding.

The mortality rate is approximately 30 per cent, with death occurring in the second week of illness.

A ‘threat to public health’

The discovery of a deadly tick in Dorset could “present a threat to public health in the UK,” the PHE said.

It is currently not known whether any more ticks have been found in the UK this year, but there have been six reported cases in Germany so far. Experts in Munich believe the creatures have mutated to survive the cold winters, rather than being brought into the country by migratory birds.

Dr Ute Mackenstedt, a parasitologist at the University of Hohenheim, told The Sun, “If the development cycle is taken into account, this cannot be the case here, as the ticks would have had to have been introduced at a time where the migratory birds had not even arrived.

“According to the latest evidence, we have to presume that these animals are able to survive the winters in Germany.”

Five of the hyalomma ticks were found on a horse at a stables, meaning there is a possibility of a possible pairing and the emergence of an independent population.

High-risk areas

Hyalomma ticks can grow to as long as two centimetres and are much larger than the local wood tick. Originating in Iran, before spreading into Asia, the Middle East, southern Europe and Africa, the ticks are recognisable by their large size and striped legs.

There are several types of tick in the UK, but the sheep tick - known as Ixodes

ricinus - is the most common.

A bite from a tick can cause a number of health problems, such as Lyme disease and tick-borne encephalitis, which in some cases can be fatal.

They can be found all across the UK, but high-risk areas include grassy and wooded spots in southern England, East Anglia, the Yorkshire Moors and the Scottish Highlands.

If you have been walking through high risk areas, you should check yourself for ticks as a precaution, paying attention to folds in the skin and the hairline.

To reduce the risk of being bitten, take the following precautions when heading outdoors:

- Cover your skin when walking outdoors
- Tuck your trousers into your socks, or wear longer socks when walking through long grassy areas
- Use insect repellent on your clothes and skin - products containing DEET are most effective
- Stick to paths wherever possible
- Wear light-coloured clothing, so ticks are easier to spot and brush off
- Carry out a tick check

Source:

<https://www.edinburghnews.scotsman.com/health/congo-fever-deadly-ticks-carrying-ebola-like-virus-found-in-uk-and-europe-1-4951054>

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