

Alpha-gal Syndrome (tick related allergy to meat and meat products)

Alpha-gal is a sugar molecule that is naturally produced in the bodies of most mammals, like cows and pigs, but not people. Alpha-gal Syndrome *may* occur when a person is bitten by a tick and alpha-gal is transferred from its saliva into the person's blood. The person's immune system identifies alpha-gal as a threat and triggers an allergic reaction. The incubation period for developing Alpha-gal Syndrome is weeks to months after being bitten by a tick. (MA DPH)

Unlike other tickborne illnesses, Alpha-gal Syndrome is a serious, potentially life-threatening allergy to alpha-gal. Symptoms range from mild to severe and vary from person to person. The CDC reports that not all people are naturally allergic to alpha-gal and Alpha-gal Syndrome only develops in specific individuals.

Alpha-gal Syndrome is mostly associated with bites from the lone star tick. In the last 12 years, there has only been 1 official case of a tickborne illness contracted from a lone star tick. Reports suggest that more of these ticks are present today than years ago.

Alpha-gal is commonly associated with the lone star tick, but has also been found in deer ticks. Deer ticks are very common in the Rochester area and are responsible for Lyme Disease, Human Granulocytic Anaplasmosis and Babesiosis.

The Reaction: The next time an affected person eats red meat (beef, pork, lamb) or is exposed to other mammal-derived products, the body releases histamines, causing an allergic response. Unlike typical food allergies, an alpha-gal reaction can occur up to 10 hours after consumption. (CDC)

Alpha-gal Syndrome is an emerging condition, and treatment should be prescribed by a healthcare provider. As always, preventing tick bites is the best way to protect yourself from tick-related illnesses.