



TICKS

Ticks are among the most efficient carriers of disease because they attach firmly when sucking blood, feed slowly and may go unnoticed for a considerable time while feeding. Ticks take several days to complete feeding.

Ticks wait for their host from the tips of grasses and shrubs (not from trees). When brushed by a moving animal or person, they quickly let go of the vegetation and climb onto the host. Ticks can only crawl; they cannot fly or jump. Ticks found on the scalp have usually crawled there from lower parts of the body. Some species of ticks will crawl several feet toward a host. Ticks can be active on winter days when the ground temperatures are about 45° Fahrenheit.

There are two groups of ticks, sometimes called the “hard” ticks and “soft” ticks.

Hard ticks, like the common dog tick, have a hard shield just behind the mouth-parts (sometimes incorrectly called the “head”); unfed hard ticks are shaped like a flat seed.

Soft ticks do not have the hard shield and they are shaped like a large raisin. Soft ticks prefer to feed on birds or bats and are seldom encountered unless these animals are nesting or roosting in an occupied building.



Preventing Tick Bites and Disease

The best way to protect yourself against tickborne illness is to avoid tick bites. This includes avoiding known tick- infested areas. However, if you live in or visit wooded areas or areas with tall grass and weeds, follow these precautions to help prevent tick bites and decrease the risk of disease:

- Wear protective clothing such as long-sleeved shirts, long trousers, boots or sturdy shoes and a head covering. (Ticks are easier to detect on light-colored clothing.) Tuck trouser cuffs in socks. Tape the area where pants and socks meet so ticks cannot crawl under clothing.
- Walk in the center of trails so weeds do not brush against you. In camping areas, individuals who sit on the ground or disturb leaf litter on the forest floor may encounter ticks.





- Apply insect repellent containing 10 percent to 30 percent DEET primarily to clothes. Apply sparingly to exposed skin. Do not spray directly to the face; spray the repellent onto hands and then apply to face. Avoid sensitive areas like the eyes, mouth and nasal membranes. Be sure to wash treated skin after coming indoors. Use repellents containing permethrin to treat clothes (especially pants, socks and shoes) but not skin. Always follow label directions; do not misuse or overuse repellents. Always supervise children in the use of repellents.
- Check yourself, children and other family members every two to three hours for ticks. Most ticks seldom attach quickly and rarely transmit disease organisms until they have been attached four or more hours. If your pets spend time outdoors, check them for ticks, too.
- If ticks are crawling on the outside of clothes, they can be removed with masking tape or cellophane tape. A ring of tape can be made around the hand by leaving the sticky side out and attaching the two ends. Ticks will stick to the tape which can then be folded over and then placed in the trash.



How to Safely Remove a Tick

If you DO find a tick attached to your skin, do not panic. Not all ticks are infected, and your risk of disease is greatly reduced if the tick is removed within the first 36 hours.

To remove a tick:

- Use a pair of pointed tweezers to grasp the tick by the head or mouth parts right where they enter the skin. DO NOT grasp the tick by the body.
- Pull firmly and steadily outward. DO NOT jerk or twist the tick.
- Place the tick in a small container of rubbing alcohol to kill it.
- Clean the bite wound with rubbing alcohol or hydrogen peroxide.
- Remove any tick promptly. The mouthparts of a tick are barbed and may remain embedded and lead to infection at the bite site if not removed promptly. Do not burn the tick with a match or cover it with petroleum jelly or nail polish. Do not use bare hands to remove the tick because tick secretions may carry disease.
- Monitor the site of the bite for the next 30 days, for the appearance of a rash. If you develop a rash or flu-like symptoms, contact your health care provider immediately.

