

TICKS



Attention gardeners, park-goers, hikers, dog walkers, campers and all of us returning to the great outdoors: it's tick season. Actually, it has been since the temperatures climbed above 40 degrees Fahrenheit. Here are some facts about ticks to help prevent them from attaching themselves to you or the kids for their next meal—your blood.

Four species abound in our area, the one to avoid especially being the black-legged or deer tick. It can carry not only Lyme disease but several others. The two other common ticks in New York State are the American dog or wood tick and the Lone Star tick.

Ticks have a life cycle of two years. The smallest forms (larva and nymph) usually live from June through August. Most dangerous is the nymph stage—very tiny, about the size of a poppy seed with 6 legs—and active in summer. They live on, and are carried by, mice, chipmunks, birds, squirrels, turkeys, and opossums. But deer and the white-footed mouse are most likely to carry ticks with Lyme disease. And deer are pretty prevalent around here.

Most ticks ambush people from foliage up to 1 ½ feet away. Black-legged ticks like high humidity and often hide in ground-level leafy debris. Larvae hatching from eggs climb up grasses, shrubs and other plants and attach to humans and other animals brushing past. Once engorged with blood, the larva drops off and molts into the 8-legged nymph stage which, in turn, waits for a blood source to appear, feeds to completion, drops off that host and molts to the adult stage. Adults mate, the female lays eggs, and the life cycle repeats. Note: they do not drop off trees; if you find one high on your body it climbed up your clothing.

To protect yourself try the following tips. Be aware of likely high-tick areas—woods, fields, pasture, brushy areas, parks—not only in the countryside but maybe your own backyard. Walk in the center of woodland paths. Wear light-colored clothing to better see the ticks, and tuck pant legs into socks or boots. Wear long-sleeved tops. Apply repellents containing 30 per cent Deet or oil of eucalyptus to exposed skin and the lower part of pants, or buy clothing treated with permethrin (farm stores, online).

When returning home, throw clothes in a dryer at high heat for twenty minutes. Or tie them in a plastic bag until laundering. Ticks can survive washing but not dryer heat. Check your body, using a hand mirror if needed. Shower within two hours. Check your body daily; if a tick was missed, within two to five days it will be engorged and big. Children should be checked daily after being outdoors.

If bitten, carefully remove the tick with tweezers close to the mouth part, lifting it up. Do not squash the tick. Wash the bite site with soap and water, rubbing alcohol or peroxide, and wash your hands thoroughly. Save the tick in a container with the date and put in your freezer or put it in a container of alcohol. You may need to give it to your doctor. You can get the tick identified at the Cornell Cooperative of Monroe County's lab at 2440 St. Paul Blvd., Rochester, NY 14617, phone (585) 753-2550. Removing the tick from skin within 24 hours can greatly reduce the risk of getting an infection such as Lyme disease.

For pets that go outdoors, check them daily and remove ticks as for humans. Ask your veterinarian about repellents, dusts or sprays, and shampoos.

Since yards can contain ticks, especially in suburban areas, near woods, brush and heavy shade and damp areas, you may want to dry out your yard. Remove leaf litter; trim trees and shrubs off the ground; remove brush; use crushed stone and wood chip barriers; and replace vegetation near buildings with hardscape. Pesticides registered for tick control contain carbaryl, cyfluthrin, deltamethrin or permethrin. They may reduce ticks but won't solve the entire problem.

Lastly, there's lots of helpful information online at these websites:

- <http://monroe.cce.cornell.edu/master-gardeners/dont-get-ticked-ny>
- <https://blogs.cornell.edu/nysipm/tag/dont-get-ticked-new-york/>
- <https://tickencounter.org/>

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