



“Tick – Talk” from Your School Nurse



Camping, hiking, gardening and just playing outdoors are all great spring and summer activities, but don't forget about the ticks that may share your living and playing spaces! Maine has had a large increase in the tick population, over the past few years, and has also seen a rise in Lyme disease (tick-borne illness). **All** ticks can transmit Lyme disease; it's not necessarily limited to deer ticks. Ticks can also transmit much more serious diseases that can be life-threatening, so it's important to practice prevention techniques, to prevent tick bites on you and your pets.

In some species and life stages, ticks are so small that they can be difficult to see, but they all hungrily look for animals and people to bite! You can find ticks in various environments, but most often they are in, or near, wooded areas. They hide under leaves, in the grass and on branches! Ticks also feed on birds and mammals, which plays a role in maintaining their existence, and the pathogens (germs and bacteria) they carry.

Prevention!

There are some simple steps you can take to protect yourself and your family:

- Avoid tick-infested areas, and sitting directly on the ground.
- Avoid sleeping with pets, and allowing pets on your furniture – ticks can travel from your furry animal and onto the skin of your family.
- Maintain your pet under a vet's care, by getting prescription tick medicine, and applying it to them.

***Frequent tick checks are probably your BEST protection from tick-borne illnesses.**

- Perform an entire body (and clothing) check after being outdoors, even if you're just in your own yard. Use a handheld or full-length mirror to view all parts of your body and remove any tick you find!
- Check children for ticks, especially in the **hair**.

***Removing ticks before they adhere to the skin prevents transmission of infection.**

- Use EPA approved repellents with DEET (*on skin and clothing*) or permethrin (*on clothing*). Always follow product instructions!! (*Parents should apply this product to their children, avoiding the hands, eyes, and mouth.*)
- Use all-natural substances (i.e. essential oils, vinegar, household oils, etc.), if preferred/indicated, to repel ticks. Lots of information and “recipes” can be found online. (***Always check for sensitivity to any substance, before use!***)
- Showering **within 2 hours** of coming indoors has shown to reduce your risk of being bitten by a tick.

What to do if you are bitten by a tick:

- Remove an attached tick as soon as you notice it—teach children to seek adult help for tick removal. (*Improper removal can increase the chances of infectious transmission thus developing Lyme disease, or other related tick-borne illnesses.*)
- Use fine-point tweezers and grasp tick by the head. Remove the tick with a steady pull, straight up, away from the skin. (*Never squeeze, twist, or yank the body of a tick, and never put substances or fluids on the tick.*) Place the tick in rubbing alcohol, in a sealed container, for testing. Wash the bite site, and your hands, with soap and water.
- Watch for signs of illness such as rash, fever, or flu-like symptoms. Contact your health care provider if these develop. Many rashes that do develop after a tick bite may not present as the “classic bull's eye rash.” You may see a solid red rash - possibly 3 inches in diameter or larger, and it may be smaller too. **IMPORTANT: Rashes do not always present at the site of the tick bite. Check EVERYWHERE!**

Thanks for your help! Your school nurse, Holly Swilo, RN.

**** (Above information taken from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website and various Lyme Disease/ Tick publications)