

## Preventing Tick Bites – Take preventive measures against ticks

While it is a good idea to take preventive measures against ticks year-round, be extra vigilant in warmer months (April through September) when ticks are most active. The best advice is to avoid direct contact with ticks by staying out of wooded and brushy areas with high grass and leaf litter and by walking in the center of trails.

However, as complete avoidance is not always possible, use products with DEET or permethrin to repel ticks. Use repellents that contain 20% to 30% DEET (N,N-diethyl-m-toluamide) on exposed skin and clothing for protection that lasts up to several hours. Always follow product instructions. Parents should apply this product to their children, avoiding hands, eyes, and mouth. Use products that contain permethrin on clothing. Treat clothing and gear, such as boots, pants, socks, and tents, with products containing 0.5% permethrin. It remains protective through several washings. Pretreated clothing is available and may be protective longer.

If you've been in an area where ticks may be present, you should make sure you haven't brought any home. Bathe or shower as soon as possible after coming indoors (preferably within 2 hours) to wash off and more easily find ticks that are crawling on you. Conduct a full-body tick check using a hand-held or full-length mirror to view all parts of your body upon return from tick-infested areas. Parents should check their children for ticks under the arms, in and around the ears, inside the belly button, behind the knees, between the legs, around the waist, and especially in their hair.

You should also examine gear and pets. Ticks can ride into the home on clothing and pets, then attach to a person later, so carefully examine pets, coats, and day packs. Tumble dry clothes in a dryer on high heat for 10 minutes to kill ticks on dry clothing after you come indoors (if clothes are damp, additional time may be needed). If the clothes require washing first, hot water is recommended. Cold and medium temperature water will not kill ticks effectively. If the clothes cannot be washed in hot water, tumble dry on low heat for 90 minutes or high heat for 60 minutes. The clothes should be warm and completely dry.

If you find a tick attached to your skin, there's no need to panic. There are several tick removal devices on the market, but a plain set of fine-tipped tweezers will remove a tick quite effectively.

- Use fine-tipped tweezers to grasp the tick as close to the skin's surface as possible.
- Pull upward with steady, even pressure. Don't twist or jerk the tick; this can cause the mouthparts to break off and remain in the skin. If this happens, remove the mouthparts with tweezers. If you are unable to remove the mouth easily with clean tweezers, leave it alone and let the skin heal.
- After removing the tick, thoroughly clean the bite area and your hands with rubbing alcohol, an iodine scrub, or soap and water.
- Dispose of a live tick by submersing it in alcohol, placing it in a sealed bag/container, wrapping it tightly in tape, or flushing it down the toilet. Never crush a tick with your fingers.
- Avoid folklore remedies such as "painting" the tick with nail polish or petroleum jelly, or using heat to make the tick detach from the skin. Your goal is to remove the tick as quickly as possible, not wait for it to detach.
- If you develop a rash or fever within several weeks of removing a tick, see your doctor. Be sure to tell the doctor about your recent tick bite, when the bite occurred, and where you most likely acquired the tick.

Ticks find their hosts by detecting breath and body odors, or by sensing body heat, moisture, and vibrations. Some species can even recognize a shadow. In addition, ticks pick a place to wait by identifying well-used paths. Then they wait for a host, resting on the tips of grasses and shrubs. Ticks can't fly or jump, but many tick species wait in a position known as "questing." While questing, ticks hold onto leaves and grass by their third and fourth pair of legs. They hold the first pair of legs outstretched, waiting to climb on to the host. When a host brushes the spot where a tick is waiting, it quickly climbs aboard. Some ticks will attach quickly and others will wander, looking for places like the ear or other areas where the skin is thinner.

By Julie Wojcik

Content source: [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\), National Center for Emerging and Zoonotic Infectious Diseases \(NCEZID\), Division of Vector-Borne Diseases \(DVBD\).](#)