

Toolbox Talks

TICKS!



Tick species are found throughout Maine. Different tick species can be very difficult to differentiate from one another. Ticks wait on the tips of grasses and shrubs where they wait for a chance to attach to a passing host.

Ticks are efficient feeders and tenacious. Once attached, there is potential for transmitting disease. In 2017, Maine had 1,787 confirmed cases of Lyme disease. With the increasing incidence of Lyme disease, Mainers should be in the habit of conducting **tick checks** after frequenting tick territory.

On humans, ticks usually migrate to the hairline, the area behind the ears, or in the armpits. It takes five to six hours for a tick to become firmly attached and up to ten days for it to become fully engorged with blood.

Normally, the greatest risk of humans contracting Lyme disease is during the seasonal peak of deer tick nymphs, which in Maine is reached in late June and July; **but a mild winter can extend the risk of tick bites into the spring and fall.** Because deer tick nymphs are tiny and their bite painless, they frequently go undetected beyond the 36 hours they usually need after attaching to transmit Lyme disease.

Deer tick or Blacklegged tick: Mostly inhabiting southern and central Maine. Capable of transmitting Lyme disease.



Lyme Disease: The early signs of Lyme disease often show up as a rash at the bite site and then flu-like symptoms. Untreated cases may lead to arthritic conditions and possible neurological problems. In Lyme disease, the rash may appear within 3-30 days, typically before the onset of fever. The Lyme disease rash is the first sign of infection and is usually a circular rash. This rash occurs in approximately 70-80% of infected persons and begins at the site of a tick bite. It may be warm, but is not usually painful.

Anaplasmosis is another tick born disease. Symptoms may include fever, headache, muscle aches, malaise, chills, nausea, cough, or confusion. Anaplasmosis can be serious if not treated early, and can be fatal even in previously healthy people.

Woodchuck or Groundhog tick: Very similar in appearance to a deer tick. A rare but dangerous virus called Powassan virus can be transmitted by this tick. Infection with Powassan virus can cause encephalitis (inflammation of the brain) and sometimes meningitis.



American dog tick: does not transmit Lyme disease and is larger than the deer tick. The non-engorged female has a whitish shield on its back.



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Personal Protective Equipment: The most important consideration in reducing tick encounters is the use of personal protection equipment. Also, by taking a few simple precautions, you can significantly reduce your exposure to ticks.



Avoid Direct Contact with Ticks: If possible, avoid walking through wooded and brushy areas with tall grass and leaf litter. Walk in the center of mowed or cleared trails to avoid brushing up against vegetation.

Dress Appropriately: Wear light-colored clothing to make ticks easier to detect.

Wear long pants tucked into socks or boots and tuck your shirt into your pants to keep ticks on the outside of your clothes. Do not wear open-toed shoes or sandals when in potential tick habitat.

Use Tick Repellents: On the exposed skin and clothing such as **20-30% DEET**. Other options are **Picaridin**, or **Oil of Lemon Eucalyptus**. **When using repellents always follow product directions.**

Use products that contain **permethrin to treat clothing and gear**. **Do not apply permethrin directly to your skin.**

REMOVING A TICK: A tick removal spoon is an effective tool for removing ticks from both humans and pets.

- 1) Place the spoon's notch on the skin near the tick. It can be used from any direction (the front, back, or side of the tick).
- 2) Apply slight downward pressure on the skin and slide the spoon forward so the notch is framing the tick. Continue sliding the spoon forward to detach the tick (do not pry, lever, or lift up).
- 3) Once the tick has detached, examine the bite site to make sure the mouthparts were completely removed. The tick can now be disposed of or saved for identification.
- 4) Cleaning the tick bite. After removing the tick, thoroughly clean the bite area, your hands, and the tick removal spoon with rubbing alcohol, an iodine scrub, or soap and water.
- 5) If a rash appears at the bite site, or flu-like symptoms are experienced after a tick bite, consult with a doctor as soon as possible.

Statistics, tick photos, prevention tips and tick removal information used with permission from University of Maine Cooperative Extension. Rash photo, Lyme disease information and Anaplasmosis information obtained from Centers for Disease Control.