

Don't let the 'ick' in ticks make you sick!

By Teddi Nicolaus

If ticks could talk, they would probably tell you they're miserable. They eat nothing but blood, look gross and are hated around the world because they can bite us and make us sick. They aren't truly insects, but instead belong to the arachnid family, which includes spiders and scorpions. But it's the disease aspect that makes them so terrible.

"Ticks can spread several different types of bacteria, viruses and parasites to humans," says Kiersten Kugeler, PhD, MPH, an epidemiologist at Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The U.S. is home to dozens of different kinds of ticks. Some of them are active



year-round, but their peak season is April through September. Their preference for warmer weather means they're scouting around for blood meals at the same time of year when many of us are enjoying outdoor activities.

Ticks usually hang out in shady, grassy, bushy and wooded areas, especially at the edges of woods and along trails. But they also can be in lawns and gardens. Summer is the most common season to get bit and contract a disease.

Ticks are wingless, so they can't jump or fly, but they can crawl, and many types of ticks lie in wait to climb aboard a host in search of a place to attach and draw blood.

With hotter weather becoming more common year round, they're now able to survive in more places for longer periods. Tick populations are growing and more people are getting sick from being bit.

Lyme disease continues to be the most common tickborne disease in the U.S., with cases doubling since 2004. Experts believe as many as half a million people get Lyme disease each year.

Other common tick-borne diseases in the U.S. include babesiosis, Rocky Mountain spotted fever and ehrlichiosis. Despite their fancy names, the symptoms of many tickborne diseases are similar, particularly in the early part of the illness, and can include fever, headache, fatigue and a rash.

"If you notice these symptoms during the summer months, you should see a health care provider," Kugeler says. "Early diagnosis and treatment is important and can prevent more serious forms of illness."

Most folks who get Lyme disease will get better by taking antibiotics for a few weeks. But up to 10% of people continue to suffer long-term symptoms, such as joint pain, muscle aches, brain fog and fatigue.

Don't wait to visit your health care provider if you suspect you have a tickborne illness or continue to experience symptoms after completing a course of antibiotics.

Ticks can be found in every U.S. state. But don't let ticks stop you from living a healthy outdoor life. Follow these tips to stay tick-free:

>> [Learn more about tick bite prevention at www.cdc.gov/ticks](http://www.cdc.gov/ticks)



Wear repellent: Insect repellents from your drug or grocery store do a great job at steering away ticks. Check the label to make sure the product is registered with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Take them for a spin: If you've been in tick-populated areas, put your clothes in a dryer on high heat for about six minutes after you take them off.

Do a body check: Fully look over your body after being outdoors. Pay special attention to parts of your body where ticks like to hide. Those include your underarms, in and around ears and hair, between legs, inside the belly button, around the waist and behind the knees.

Rinse them off: A shower can help wash any creepy eight-legged critters you missed down the drain.

Removing ticks: Get 'em all

The body of an adult tick is flat and oval and about the size of an apple seed, unless they've just fed, in which case they will look rounder and fat. If you find one on you, don't panic.

Use tweezers to grasp the tick at its head or mouth and pull firmly until the tick lets go. Don't twist the tick or rock it from side to side. Make sure to get the head out!

Dispose of the tick by putting it in alcohol, placing it in a sealed bag or flushing it down the toilet. Wash your hands and the site of the bite with soap and water and swab the bite site with alcohol to disinfect your skin.



Keep your pets tick-free

Pets can get tickborne diseases too, and they can also bring ticks into your home.

If your furry friend spends a lot of time outdoors, you'll want to check for ticks each day by running your fingers slowly over their entire body. If you feel a bump or swollen area, check to see if a tick is there.

Don't forget to check their paws and between their toes, around their legs, inside their ears and all around their face, chin and neck.

Keep your best friend healthy by safely removing any ticks you find. You should also talk to your veterinarian about flea and tick prevention. That way your pet won't bring anything besides their floofy face the next time they jump in your bed!



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