

Be on the lookout for ticks this summer

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Ticks are slow-crawling, wingless, eight-legged parasites that burrow their mouth parts into the skin of people and animals to suck blood. Once firmly attached, they are difficult to remove.

Ticks feed exclusively on the blood of animals (mammals, birds and reptiles). Ticks receive no sustenance from plants.

However, habitats such as forest edges with mixed trees, grasses and other woody and non-woody plants often are heavily infested with ticks—such habitats offer food and cover for many kinds of animal hosts and favor tick survival by providing increased humidity and protection from direct sunlight.

A Few Tick Control Methods

Tick control is difficult and requires a combination of strategies.

• Pesticides Applied to Outdoor Areas

Pesticides that kill mites and ticks are referred to as acaricides. Outdoor tick control can be implemented on recreation sites, lawns and non-cropland. Be sure the specific situation for tick control matches the wording on the pesticide label. Do not treat pastures with acaricides. Keep spray or drift from contaminating food crops or grazing areas.

Acaricidal use is most successful when integrated with cultural control methods. Choose acaricides with lasting residual activity but that do not cause danger to human users of the site. Apply treatments when other people are not present; allow reentry only after the acaricide has dried. Do not treat areas that shed runoff into streams or lakes. Acaricides for outdoor tick control include carbaryl (Sevin), diazinon, chlorpyrifos (Dursban) and propoxur (Baygon). Additional products may be used by certified commercial pest control personnel.

• Pesticides Applied to Dogs and Cats

This group includes dips, shampoos, dusts and sprays of many of the chemicals listed in the previous paragraphs. Only use products with specific label directions for application to the animal species being treated. Dips containing amitraz (Mitaban) or permethrin

(many trade names) are effective; a unique new chemical, fipronil (Frontline TopSpot) kills ticks on pets for up to a month after treatment. As with fleas, if tick control indoors and outdoors is to be effective it must be correlated with treatment of the pets.

Tick repellents for use on pets include pyrethrins and some permethrin products. Tick repellents and tick-killing collars seldom do a complete job. Daily hand-picking of ticks from your cat or dog is important if the animal frequents infested environments. Keeping ticks from becoming engorged on pets reduces the number of ticks close to home the following season.

• Personal Protection

Avoid unnecessary trips into tall grass, weeds and brushy and forested areas. Also, restrict pets from such areas. In tick-infested areas, seek open areas and trails. For resting, choose bare ground in a sunlit area.

• Clothing as a Barrier

Long-sleeved shirts, close-fitting cuffs, high necklines and long trousers make it more difficult for ticks to reach bare skin. Once on your clothing, ticks climb upward, so upper clothing should be tucked into lower clothing—shirt into trousers, trousers into long stockings or boot tops. Increase protection by taping sock tops over pantlegs with wide tape and apply a second layer of tape with the sticky side out to trap crawling ticks. Light-colored clothing helps you see and intercept ticks before they reach skin.

• Repellents for Use on People

Repellents should not be used on young children. Do not allow repellents to be inhaled or come in contact with eyes, nostrils or mouth. Apply repellent to clothing from the ankles to the knees and around the beltline. The active ingredient in most commercial repellents is N, N diethyl-meta-toluamide, often called Deet. Deet repels ticks for only a few hours.

Repellents containing 0.5 percent permethrin (e.g., Permanone Tick Repellent, Coulston's Duranon Tick Repellent, Cutter Outdoor Gear Guard Insect Repellent) can be sprayed outdoors onto clothing and allowed

to dry outdoors before wearing.

Treated clothing is a repellent to ticks through three or more ordinary launderings. Permethrin-based repellents should not be applied to skin, but they are recommended for outer clothing of people who must spend a lot of time in tick-infested sites. Dusting sulfur is effective but messy and, with perspiration, causes an undesirable odor.

• Personal Inspection

After coming from tick infested areas, remove your clothes and inspect yourself for ticks. Children need help searching themselves. Larval and nymphal ticks may be mistaken for freckles or small scabs, so look carefully. Family members, even infants, who have not been outdoors are sometimes bitten by ticks carried in by others; so they, too, should be checked for ticks. Ticks that are removed within a few hours are unlikely to have transmitted disease.

Inspect the clothing or immediately wash it so ticks can't crawl out of it onto other clothing, furniture or carpets. Leave camping gear and bedrolls outside until well inspected.

Tick Removal

To remove an embedded tick, place fine-tipped tweezers close to the skin, grasp its "head" and pull (gently and patiently) directly away from the skin surface. Never twist or pull sideways.

• **Do not** try to make the tick back out with heat, petroleum jelly or irritants. Such methods only work when the tick is not securely attached. A deeply attached tick is anchored not only with a mouthpart that has microscopic, recurved teeth, but also with a cement-like substance. Only when the tick is full does it produce a salivary component that dissolves the cement and allows it to withdraw. Irritants or smothering agents may cause a tick to regurgitate, which increases the likelihood of disease transmission and secondary infection.

• **Do not** squeeze the tick's body, as you may squeeze its gut contents into the skin, causing infection.

Disinfect the tick bite. Save ticks removed from humans in alcohol with the date and the victim's name on the container. Use a different container for each person and for each bite occasion. Be especially watchful for flu-like illness, headache, lack of balance, nausea, extreme fatigue, skin rashes or fever for the first 10 to 14 days after the tick-bite incident. If such symptoms develop, see a physician and take the tick(s) with you to the appointment. The identity of the tick may help determine which diseases should be considered in making a diagnosis. The doctor may identify the tick, or you can take it to your local K-State Research and Extension office and have it sent to the K-State Insect Diagnostic Laboratory.



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