

Tick Bite

What are ticks?

Ticks are small wingless bugs that feed on the blood of animals, birds, and people. They have 8 legs and are related to spiders and mites. There are many different kinds of ticks. Black-legged ticks, or deer ticks, are usually tiny, no bigger than the head of a pin. Wood and dog ticks are usually much larger—about a quarter inch before feeding and half an inch when they are full of blood.

How do tick bites occur?

Ticks are found among plants and trees as well as on animals in low-lying brush in woodlands, grasslands, and marshlands and at the seashore. Wild birds and animals, as well as domestic animals and pets such as dogs, horses, and cows, can carry ticks. Ticks may climb on humans from animals, leaf litter, or low-lying brush. Ticks cannot jump or fly.

How do I know if I have been bitten by a tick?

You usually will not feel anything when a tick bites you. If you find a tick attached to your skin, you have been bitten. You may have a little redness around the area of a bite.

Can I get sick from a tick bite?

There is little risk from the bite of a tick most of the time. However, some ticks carry infections that can be passed to people. For example, deer tick bites may cause Lyme disease. The early symptoms of Lyme disease occur within the first week to months after being bitten by an infected tick. These include flulike symptoms and a rash that resembles a bulls-eye or target located on one area of the skin. A bite from other ticks such as the wood tick or dog tick may cause Rocky Mountain spotted fever (RMSF). RMSF may first cause flulike symptoms and then a pink or red spotted rash. Tick bites may cause other diseases as well.

How are tick bites treated?

If you find a tick attached to your body, you need to remove it. You can remove it yourself or get help from your healthcare provider. To remove an attached tick:

- Grasp the tick with tweezers as close to the skin as possible.
- Gently pull the tick straight away from you until it releases its hold. Use a slow gentle pulling motion. Pulling the tick out too quickly may tear the body from the mouth, leaving the mouth still in the skin. If you are unable to remove the tick completely, you may need to see your healthcare provider.
- Do not twist the tick as you pull, and try not to squeeze its body. Squeezing or crushing the tick could force infected fluids from the tick into the site of the bite.

After you have removed the tick, thoroughly wash your hands and the bite area with soap and water. Put an antiseptic such as rubbing alcohol on the area where you were bitten.

Save the tick in case you later start having symptoms of disease and need to know what kind of tick bit you. Put the tick in a clean dry jar, small plastic bag, or other sealed container and keep it in the freezer. Identification of the tick may help your provider diagnose and treat your symptoms. If you do not have any symptoms of disease after 1 month, you can discard the tick.

How can I take care of myself?

If you find a tick on your body, remove it right away. Infected ticks usually do not spread an infection until after the tick has been attached and feeding on your blood for several hours.

Check for a rash and other symptoms for about 4 weeks after the bite.

Call your healthcare provider if:

- You have flulike symptoms after a bite such as fever, headache, muscle aches, joint pain or swelling, and a general feeling of illness.
- You have signs of infection, such as new or worse redness, swelling, pain, warmth, or drainage.
- A tick has bitten you and you think the tick may be a deer tick.
- You develop a bulls-eye rash or a rash with tiny purple or red spots.

How can I help prevent tick bites?

- Be aware of the areas where ticks live. Do not walk, camp, or hunt in the woods of tick-infested areas without precautions.
- In areas of thick underbrush, try to stay near the center of trails.
- When you are outdoors, wear long-sleeved shirts tucked into your pants. Wear your pants tucked into your socks or boot tops if possible. A hat may help, too. Wearing light-colored clothing may make it easier to spot the small tick before it reaches your skin and bites. While you are outside, check for ticks every 4 hours and remove any ticks on clothing or exposed skin.
- Use approved tick repellents on exposed skin and clothing. Don't use more repellent than recommended in the package directions. Don't put repellent on open wounds or rashes. Don't put it on your eyes or mouth. When using sprays for the skin, don't spray the repellent directly on your face. Spray the repellent on your hands first and then put it on your face. Then wash the spray off your hands.
 - Adults should use products with no more than 35% DEET. Children older than 2 months can use repellents with no more than 30% DEET. DEET should be applied just once a day. Wash it off your body when you go back indoors.
 - Picaridin may irritate the skin less than DEET and appears to be just as effective.

- Spray clothes with repellents because insects may crawl from clothing to the skin or bite through thin clothing. Products containing permethrin are recommended for use on clothing, shoes, bed nets, and camping gear. Permethrin-treated clothing repels and kills ticks, mosquitoes, and other insects and can keep working after laundering. Permethrin should be reapplied to clothing according to the instructions on the product label. Some commercial products are available pretreated with permethrin. Permethrin does not work as a repellent when it is put on the skin.
- Treat household pets for ticks and fleas. Check pets after they have been outdoors.
- Brush off clothing and pets before entering the house.
- After you have been outdoors, undress and check your body for ticks. They usually crawl around for several hours before biting. Check your clothes, too. Wash them right away to remove any ticks.
- Shower and shampoo after your outing.
- Inspect any gear you have carried outdoors.
- If you spend much time hiking, you may want to include a pair of tick tweezers in your first-aid kit. The tweezers are available at many sporting goods stores.

Developed by RelayHealth.

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