

TICKS

Tick season is just beginning to gear up. Deer ticks are the ticks that carry Lyme disease and they are becoming more common in southwest Michigan north to Muskegon County. Unlike the American dog tick, deer ticks do not have white markings on their backs. They look very much like the deer tick and some are quite common. If you remove a tick that does not have white markings, it might be a good idea to save the tick for identification.

If a tick is removed within 24 hours, the chances of it transmitting Lyme disease or other infections are much less.

Dog tick bites rarely result in serious disease in Michigan, but like other wood ticks, it is a known carrier of Rocky Mountain spotted fever and tularemia. The cases of Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever reported in Michigan have been from primarily southern counties, particularly those located directly north of the Toledo Airport. Also, toxins injected with their bites cause itching, fever and in some cases tick paralysis. People with recent tick bites should be on alert for any rash, which is a primary symptom of both Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever and tularemia.

Popular, but wrong folk methods are: applying rubbing alcohol, smothering with Vaseline, painting with fingernail polish, twisting clockwise (or counterclockwise), and touching with a hot match. In fact, the hot match could make the tick vomit infected secretions into the wound. Though these methods are popular, they are not the best.

Use fine point tweezers to grasp the tick as close to the skin as possible. Use gentle, steady, straight force to pull the tick out. Avoid squeezing the body of the tick. Clean the site of the bite, your hands and the tweezers with disinfectant. You may want to wear protective gloves. You may also want to place the tick in a small container, like a pill container, and bring it to your vet for identification. Never use a burned match, petroleum jelly or nail polish to try to remove ticks. These methods are ineffective.

The tick can be killed by soaking it in rubbing alcohol or flushing down the toilet (it should not be crushed or squeezed). Hands should be washed afterwards. Check with your local health department to see if they want the tick for monitoring purposes.

Family members and pets should be inspected daily were ticks are known to be abundant. Insect repellents containing DEET or permethrin applied to clothing will help keep wood ticks from biting. Keep in mind that ticks cannot feed immediately after attaching. They require several hours to imbed their mouthparts deep enough to take a blood meal.

Prompt and complete removal of ticks does help prevent illness. This a situation where the folk remedies can do more harm than good.

Children and adults who are hiking, picnicking or playing tin tick infested areas should wear long pants and tuck the ends of the pants into their socks. While you are outside look for ticks on each other every 4 hours and remove any ticks on the clothing or exposed skin.

The **Master Gardener Hotline** is open from April to October, Monday through Friday. Lines are available 9:00 am to noon and 1:00 pm to 4:00 pm at 888-678-3464

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