

Tick-ing Time Bomb?

0

BY [ROB SENIOR](#) ON JUNE 12, 2018 [INFECTION PREVENTION](#)



The tick problem has gradually grown over the past decade, and this summer may be the worst yet

If you or your patients live in an area with a considerable deer population—chances are you're familiar with the concept of tick season.

They're not quite insects, not quite spiders—but they certainly are a nuisance. They feed only on blood, and if infected with bacteria or viruses, they can pose a risk to human health.

Unfortunately, the months of May, June, and July are the most fruitful to the tick population, which thrives in humid, forested areas. Here's some background information and suggestions for avoiding problems this summer.

Where are Ticks found?

Ticks can be found anywhere, but as mentioned they thrive in humid areas with lots of trees, fallen leaves or other natural debris. You're unlikely to find a tick in an open field with lots of sun.

There are many species of ticks, three of which are most plentiful in the United States: Black-legged, or deer ticks, found in the Midwest and the Northeast

- Dog ticks, common in the Midwest and Eastern U.S.
- Lone star ticks, most commonly found in Southeastern states

SOURCES: CDC, statistics from CNN

If you are not sure how to classify or identify a tick and want more information, you may want to visit the resources center at tickencounter.org.

Disease Dangers

Ticks can be responsible for serious, but increasingly rare diseases, the most well-known of which may be Powassan virus. Only discovered about 60 years ago, about 75 cases of the disease have been reported across the Northeastern U.S., the Great Lakes region and Canada in the past decade.

Many infected people never show symptoms, but there is the potential for long-term neurological issues and even death with Powassan virus.

According to [the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](http://www.cdc.gov), mosquito, tick, and flea-borne illnesses doubled across the United States between 2004–2016—and Lyme disease is primarily to blame. Experts confirm that Lyme disease is by far the most common tick-borne disease, with the CDC receiving about 30,000 reports of new cases annually. Fever, headache, fatigue, and a bullseye rash called erythema migrans are among the most common symptoms. Infection can eventually affect joints, the heart, and the nervous system. Again, the vast majority of cases are concentrated in the Northeastern and upper Midwestern states.

What to Do if You Find a Tick?

A bite itself from a tick is usually painless, but much like mosquito bites, can quickly become itchy. Lately, the emphasis has turned to finding ticks on someone and discarding them before they have the chance to bite.

When checking yourself, or others, for ticks, be aware that they tend to gravitate toward the warmer parts of the body—the groin, scalp and armpit cited as the three most common locations. The ears, behind the knees, and waist area are also mentioned as possible landing places.

If you find a tick, the CDC's recommendation is to remove it with a pair of tweezers, then thoroughly clean the bite area with alcohol, soap, and water. They also recommend saving the tick, rather than panicking and squishing it like you would an ant. Doctors are increasingly interested in identification of ticks to further their knowledge of the subject.

Above all—don't panic. There's no need to go to an emergency room or to the doctor unless symptoms appear. If fever or a rash develop, that's the sign that a healthcare professional should be involved.

How can people Avoid Ticks?

The truth is that environmental factors play the biggest role. People are unlikely to encounter many ticks if they live in an open, urban area; while living near the woods makes it almost impossible to suggest any foolproof avoidance strategies.

The Environmental Protection Agency recommends looking for an ingredient called Deet in any insect repellents you might use.

Pets—dogs in particular—can carry some of the same ticks that affect human. A tick collar can be effective, but won't destroy all potential parasites. While dogs can carry the Lyme disease tick, they don't transmit the disease to humans

SOURCES: CDC, statistics from CNN