

National Conservation Training Center

Tick Precautions

Ticks and Diseases

There are two tick species that a person is most likely to encounter at NCTC. One is the American dog tick, *Demacentor variabilis*, sometimes called the wood tick, which many people are familiar with. The American dog tick only feeds on people or pets while in its adult stage. The primary disease risk is Rocky Mountain spotted fever (which **is** found in the eastern U.S. too), though tularemia and tick paralysis may also be carried. These diseases are relatively rare, though precautions and attention to any symptoms are sensible measures. The other common tick is the blacklegged tick, *Ixodes scapularis*, also known as the deer tick. This is a small tick that is easily overlooked. The blacklegged tick may feed on people or pets at the larvae, nymph or adult stages of life, and may carry Lyme disease as well as another disease called babesiosis. Most Lyme disease is transmitted to humans by the blacklegged tick in the nymph stage, when they are size of the head of a pin. A number of cases of Lyme disease have occurred at NCTC, so precautions are in order.

Tick Habitat

You are most likely to have ticks attach themselves onto you when you are walking through tall grass and broadleaf vegetation. Ticks often hang on the leaf tips of grass and other plants and try to grab onto an animal or person (usually on the lower leg) as they brush by. Staying on paved, mowed or other maintained paths, or mowed lawn areas will reduce the opportunity for contact with ticks. However, coursework or personal outdoor activities might be taking you “off the beaten path”, so there are things you can do limit your exposure.

Personal Protection

Clothing - Wearing light-colored clothing when outdoors makes ticks easier to spot. Tucking pants into socks and/or duct-taping pants-legs closed at the bottom (duct tape available at the Front Desk) can hinder ticks climbing up your legs.

Repellents - Apply insect repellent labeled for ticks. The active ingredient DEET at appropriate concentrations is effective on ticks and may be applied to both clothes and skin (for most people). The gift shop and the Front Desk sell a DEET-based tick repellent spray. Apply as per label to your feet, legs, waist, etc. Tick repellents with permethrin are meant to be used on clothing only.

Body Check - Studies have indicated that regularly checking for and removing ticks **is the most effective way** to prevent Lyme disease and other tick-borne diseases.

Removal

Transmission of the Lyme disease bacteria typically does not begin until 36-48 hours after attachment, so do not act in haste. Pull attached ticks straight up using thin-tipped tweezers or forceps that close at the skin and don't pinch the tick's body. Do not use heat, chemicals, etc. to try to remove the tick. Wash the area and disinfect it with alcohol, antibiotic ointment, etc. Record the date. If unusual swelling, redness or rash appears, or if you develop a fever, severe headache, chills, or other symptoms, contact a physician immediately.

References

Stafford III, K. C., 2007, Tick Management Handbook. Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station, Bulletin No. 1010