

Are You Getting “Tick-ed Off”?

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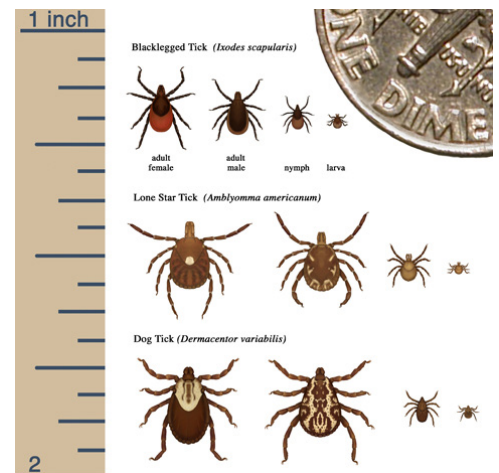
When planning to go outside there are many things we want to bring back with us; chairs, towels, coolers, trash, sunscreen, and great memories. But we can all agree there is at least one thing we want to leave behind...ticks! Let's talk about how we can all get ticks off!

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts reports we are at high risk of getting bit by a tick nearly all year; spring, summer and fall¹. Backyards, wooded, damp and tall grassy areas are where you are likely to encounter these teeny bugs¹. Ticks feed on reptiles, birds, and mammals; including our outdoor pets, deer, rodents, and people¹. They attach to their hosts by direct contact; ticks do not fly or jump¹.

Let's review tick safety practices to follow before you go outside, when you are outside, when you return home, and what happens if you get bit by a tick.

Before you go outside:

- Use a repellent registered by the Environmental Protection Agency to protect against ticks. Not sure how to find out that information? [Look here](#).²
- Treat clothing and gear with products that contain 0.5% permethrin. Find out more [here](#).³
- Wear light colors to make it easier to see a tick³.
- Wear long sleeves and tuck long pants into your socks when it is possible to reduce the likelihood of a tick attaching to your skin³.
- Bring a first aid kit with tweezers.
- Talk to your vet about the best way to protect your pets and/or livestock¹.



(Centers for Disease Control and Prevention chart)

While you are outside:

- When it is possible, stay on pathways and the center of hiking/walking trails³.

When you return home:

- Check yourself, your loved ones and pets every day, especially after being outside. The places to pay close attention to are “inside and behind ears, along hairline, back of neck, armpits, groin, legs, behind knees and between the toes”.¹
 - Remember ticks are very small! Look for something that looks like a new “freckle”.
- Check the gear and clothing you used outside. Ticks can travel with you and what you bring with you!¹

If you get bit by a tick:

- Don't panic; remove the tick as soon as possible. Simply take a pair of tweezers and grab the tick with the tweezers as close to the skin as possible. Pull the tick straight out.
 - Do not apply anything topical to help remove the tick.
- Make a note of the day you pulled the tick off on a paper or electronic calendar. You can save the tick for identification if you'd like to pursue this action.
- Call your primary care doctor.
- If you notice a rash or if you feel sick call your doctor to provide them with more information. Especially if you experience a fever, headache, fatigue, or sore and aching muscles¹.

It is important to protect yourself against ticks because they can spread diseases¹. Below we will describe the three different species of ticks, with two species, that we are most likely to come into contact with during our outdoor adventures in Massachusetts¹.

Black-legged Ticks are more commonly known as deer ticks. Young and adult deer ticks will bite humans throughout spring, summer, fall, and adults will bite humans in the winter when temperatures are above freezing. This type of tick can spread Lyme disease, babesiosis, anaplasmosis, *Borrelia miyamotoi*, and Powassan virus.

Dog Ticks are the other common type of tick in Massachusetts. Only adult dog ticks will bite humans. The highest risk of being bite by a dog tick is during spring and summer. This type of tick can spread Rocky Mountain spotted fever and certain types of tularemia.

Lone Star Ticks are not a significant threat in Massachusetts. However young and adult female lone star ticks can spread, “tularemia, ehrlichiosis and southern tick-associated rash illness (STARI)” when they bite humans¹.

If you have any questions about ticks or tick bites, contact your primary care physician or local health department.

For more information on Tick borne diseases:

Massachusetts Department of Public Health
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

How to do a tick-check:

Massachusetts Department of Public Health

References

1 <https://www.mass.gov/service-details/tick-borne-disease-information-for-the-public>

2 <https://www.epa.gov/insect-repellents>

3 https://www.cdc.gov/ticks/avoid/on_people.html

Photo: https://www.cdc.gov/ticks/life_cycle_and_hosts.html