

7 things everyone should know about ticks

Protect yourself and your pets with these top tick tips.

All ticks come in small, medium and large sizes.

Ticks have four main life stages: eggs (the smallest size), larvae (equivalent to a grain of sand), nymphs (the medium size, about the size of a poppy seed) and adults (the largest size, about the size of an apple seed).

Ticks crawl up.

Ticks live on the ground no matter the locale. They typically crawl up from grass blades onto a host and migrate upward, which is why they're often found on the scalp—they want to feed around the head, neck, and ears of their host, where the skin is thinner.

Cold and snowy? No big deal.

Yup, winter doesn't bother certain tick species. In fact, adult stage deer ticks become active every year after the first frost. While some ticks go dormant, deer ticks will be active any winter day that the ground is not snow-covered or frozen. This surprises people, especially during a January thaw or early spring day.

Ticks carry disease-causing microbes.

Tick-transmitted infections are more common these days than in past decades. With explosive increases in deer populations, the trend is increasing abundance and geographic spread of deer ticks and lone star ticks; and scientists are finding an ever-increasing list of disease-causing microbes transmitted by these ticks. Tick bites used to be an annoyance, but now a bite is much more likely to make you sick.

If you (or your dog, cat or horse) are bitten, you probably won't know it.

This is super creepy, but tick bites are painless (ticks' saliva has anesthetic properties) and hosts generally don't feel it. What's worse: fewer than half of people who've been infected with Lyme disease show the "bull's-eye rash" that was once thought to be a telltale sign of the disease. If you start showing flulike symptoms in the middle of summer (fever, chills, aches, and pains are common symptoms of a variety of tick-borne diseases),



go to the doctor and ask to be tested for the illnesses associated with ticks. This is also why it's essential to keep a close eye on your pet and check for ticks after it spends time outdoors.

The easiest way to remove a tick is with pointed tweezers.

Think of a tick as a little germ-filled balloon. Squeeze it too hard on its back end, and all the germs get pushed to the front end. Using really pointy tweezers, it's possible to grab even the poppy-seed sized nymphs right down next to the skin. The next step is to simply pull the tick out like a splinter. Other tick removal methods, like a hot match, Vaseline, dish soap and cotton, or various little key-like devices don't work, so don't bother trying. And your safest bet is going to a doctor or veterinarian for removal.

Tick bites and tick-borne diseases are 100% preventable.

There's really only one way to become infected with a tick-transmitted disease, and that's from a tick bite. Taking steps to protect yourself (with tick-repellent clothing or spraying tick repellent on clothing) and your pets (with year-round preventive medication and regular tick checks) especially if you spend any time outdoors will drastically reduce your risk of developing tick-borne diseases. Remember, just one bite is all it takes to make you or your pet sick—so prevention is your best bet.