

Tick Watch

By Cathy Monroe

Ticks are small, mite-like animals commonly found in our fields and forests. They are parasites, feeding upon the blood of other animals. Among the species that include humans as their host is the Western Black-Legged Tick. This tick is small with black legs, the female having reddish-brown bodies and the male is blackish brown. Because this tick carries Lyme disease, many people have become concerned about going outdoors and getting a tick bite. Fortunately, only a small percentage of ticks carry the disease and most experts agree that a tick needs to stay lodged for over 24 hours in order to transmit the disease. With care you can watch out and find the ticks before they get under your skin.

Take care when going through tick habitat. Adult ticks climb up onto the tips of grasses in search of their host (a rabbit, deer, dog, or you!). They have no eyes to see, but sense movement with photosensitive skin and recognize certain distinct chemical smells of mammals. They can patiently perch on a blade of grass for months until the right host brushes against them. This behavior is called questing. Adult ticks are most active in fall, winter, and spring. The younger, tiny nymph tick is most active in late spring and is found in the leaf litter under trees where it seeks rodents, lizards, birds, and larger mammals. (you!) **Any time you go off of the trails, especially through grassy fields or lie down on the ground, you are more likely to come into contact with ticks.

Wear protective clothing. Wear long pants during tick season (Fall through Spring) with your socks pulled over the ends of your pants so ticks can't crawl up inside.

Keep checking. As you hike check for ticks every 10 to 20 minutes and very thoroughly at the end of the outing.

If a tick does bore in, it's important to remove it promptly and properly. Use a pair of fine-point tweezers. Grasp the tick as close as possible to the point of attachment and slowly and gently pull until your skin starts to lift. Keep up the gentle pressure until the tick comes loose. Don't twist or jerk. If you don't have tweezers and use your fingers, wear thin gloves or hold plastic wrap or paper between your fingers and the tick. After you remove the tick, use antiseptic on the wound and wash your hands and tools. If you leave part of the tick imbedded in your skin, it should be removed by a physician to avoid infection. It is natural for a tick bite to get inflamed and hurt for several days, but if an expanding red rash with a clear

center develops (a "bull's-eye" rash), this could be a symptom of Lyme disease and you should see a physician. Be alert for flue-like symptoms which often occur during the first stage of the disease. Early treatment with antibiotics usually eliminates Lyme disease entirely. If you do find a tick, take time to watch it and check it out under a handlense. You will be fascinated by what you see!