

MESSENGER-INQUIRER



Ticks in Kentucky and Protecting Yourself

Be mindful of your outdoor activities and watch for ticks. It is important to take precautions to prevent tick bites. Looking for ticks on yourself and others is important to include in a daily routine after going outside.

Kentucky is an ideal environment for ticks as we have forests, humidity, and a large deer population. Ticks do not discriminate on location, and we find them in urban, suburban, and rural environments. Dr. Johnathan Larson, University of Kentucky Entomology Extension Specialist, describes the ticks and provides other important facts.

The three most common ticks in Kentucky are the lone star tick, American dog tick, and the blacklegged tick. Another tick to mention is the Asian longhorn tick which has been found in a few places in Kentucky. This one impacts livestock.

Ticks must have three blood meals to develop and reproduce. Those blood meals may come from wildlife, animals, or you and me. The vast majority of bites from these ticks are just itchy nuisances that last between seven to 10 days, but a small percentage of bites can cause serious allergic reactions and illnesses.

The female lone star ticks have a white spot on their backs. Males are reddish brown. Lone star ticks are vectors of human ehrlichiosis, a bacterial disease, and alpha-gal syndrome, known

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as the “red meat allergy”. All developmental stages of the tick will feed on humans, and unlike other tick species that lay in wait for a host, lone star ticks actively seek out a blood meal. The turkey mites that I receive calls about are the larval stage of the lone star tick. At this stage, they are very small and can be found in large numbers.

The blacklegged tick is the only species that tends to be active year-round in Kentucky, and it is the only known vector of Lyme disease. Blacklegged ticks have a reddish-brown body, a dark head, long mouthparts, and dark legs. Males have a dark plate that covers their whole body, while females have a dark plate that covers half of their body.

The American dog tick is the primary vector of Rocky Mountain spotted fever. It is reddish-brown with mottled white markings on its back. Only adult American dog ticks feed on humans.

Minimize your chances of getting a tick bite by not walking through or brushing up against high grass, brush, or other tick-prone areas. Ticks prefer to live in woods, tall grass, weeds, and brush. They climb onto low vegetation and attach to suitable hosts which pass by, including pets and people. Walk in the center of mowed trails to avoid brushing up against vegetation.

Keep grass and shrubs in your yard trimmed, and clear overgrown vegetation from the edges of your property. Remove leaf litter and weeds along the lawn edges. Ticks avoid direct sunlight and will not infest areas that are well-maintained.

Another tip is to wear a tick repellent that contains DEET on exposed skin and use a repellent containing permethrin on your clothing and gear. Check with a pediatrician or doctor to determine which tick repellent is safe for children. Read all precautions before using repellents.

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Also, wearing light-colored clothing makes ticks easier to see. Tuck long pants into your socks or boots to minimize the chances of ticks attaching to your pant leg.

Many times, ticks find their way indoors through our pets. Reduce your pet's chances of attracting ticks by using products recommended by your veterinarian.

Promptly finding and removing ticks is key to reducing your chances of contracting Rocky Mountain spotted fever and Lyme disease. Ticks must be attached to humans for several hours before they transmit these diseases. While outdoors, you should check yourself and your friends, family members, and pets for ticks every two to three hours and again after you return home.

Some of the most common places to find ticks on your body are behind your ears, hair, neck, legs, and around your waist. When you find an attached tick on your body, use fine-point tweezers and grasp the tick just behind the point of attachment, then pull slowly and steadily until the tick is dislodged. Vaseline, matches, and other alternative methods of removal should be avoided. These only cause the tick to inject more saliva that will cause more irritation at that site. Wash the bite area, apply antiseptic, and cover with a band-aid.

Treating open lawns is of little benefit since this is not a preferred habitat for ticks. Barrier applications of insecticides labeled for tick control can be applied around edges of lawns and mowed areas.

For more information about managing ticks, contact the Daviess County Cooperative Extension Service Office at 270-685-8480 or annette.heisdorffer@uky.edu. "Ticks and Diseases in Kentucky" is available at <https://entomology.ca.uky.edu/ef618e> and in Spanish at <https://entomology.ca.uky.edu/ef618esp> or from the office.

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Annette's Tip:

Even though this is a repeat, a good rule of thumb is to apply a pre-emergent herbicide to prevent crabgrass by the time forsythia begins to drop its blooms. I have already seen some forsythia shrubs blooming which is about a month earlier than some years.

Upcoming Event:

Spring and summer beekeeping practices for intermediate and experienced beekeepers will be discussed by Steve Hahus on Saturday, March 11 from 9:30 to 11:00 am. This will take place at the Daviess County Cooperative Extension Service Office and there will be a \$3 fee at the door. Preregister, if possible, by emailing hshahus@aol.com.

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