



TICKS FACT SHEET

What are Ticks?

Ticks are small, external parasites that feed on the blood of mammals (including humans), birds and reptiles. Texas is home to several different species of ticks. They live in warm, damp, wooded areas or areas of tall grass. Ticks crawl up plants and perch until they catch on to any host that may brush past them. Once on a host, they crawl around until they find a place to burrow in and begin their blood meal.

How do ticks affect humans?

Ticks can cause disease in humans by transmitting virus or bacteria while they bite (feed on blood). The bite of a tick can become irritated and result in an infection. Some ticks may release a neurotoxin that causes paralysis. Some of the diseases transmitted by ticks are Lyme Disease, Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever, Q fever, Babesiosis, Ehrlichiosis and Tularemia. Ticks should not be allowed to attach themselves to people or pets, if attached, they should be removed promptly.

How can I protect myself from ticks?

- **Know where to expect ticks.** Ticks live in moist and humid environments, particularly in or near wooded or grassy areas. You may come into contact with ticks during outdoor activities around your home or when walking through vegetation such as leaf litter or shrubs. Always walk in the center of trails, in order to avoid ticks.
- **Use a repellent with DEET** (on skin or clothing) or permethrin (on clothing) and wear long sleeves, long pants and socks. Products containing permethrin can be used to treat boots, clothing and camping gear which can remain protective through several washings. Repellents containing 20% or more DEET (N, N-diethyl-m-toluamide) can be applied to the skin, and they can protect up to several hours. Always follow product instructions! Parents should apply this product to their children, avoiding the hands, eyes, and mouth.
- **Wear light-colored clothing**, which allows you to see ticks crawling on your clothing.
- **Tuck your pant legs into your socks** so that ticks cannot crawl up inside of your pant legs. Some ticks can crawl down into shoes and are small enough to crawl through most socks. When traveling in areas with lone star ticks (which are associated with Southern tick-associated rash illness, ehrlichiosis, and possibly

Rocky Mountain spotted fever) you should examine your feet and ankles to ensure that ticks are not attached.

What is the correct way to remove a tick?

Using tweezers, grasp the tick firmly as close to the skin as possible. Pull the tick with a firm and steady motion until it is removed. Don't pull back sharply, as this may tear the mouthparts from the body, leaving them embedded in the skin. The mouthparts alone generally cannot transmit disease because the tick can no longer pump saliva into the skin. However, to prevent secondary infection from germs that may be on the mouthparts, remove the mouthparts as you would a splinter. Clean the skin with soap and water. The tick can be flushed down the toilet. Note the date when the tick was removed.

Do not crush the tick because the blood could get on your skin and infect you. Do not use a match, nail polish, or any other substance to remove a tick.

How do I protect my pets from ticks?

If you find a tick on your pet, follow the same procedure for removal. Check with your veterinarian. There are many approved chemicals for flea and tick prevention on pets.

How do I protect my yard from ticks?

- Modify your landscape to create Tick-Safe Zones. Provide a vegetation-free area by keeping play areas and playground equipment away from shrubs, bushes, and other vegetation. Also, regularly remove leaf litter and clear tall grasses and brush around homes, and place wood chips or gravel between lawns and wooded areas to keep ticks away from recreational areas.
- Use a chemical control agent. Effective tick control chemicals are available for use by the homeowner, or they can be applied by a professional pest control expert, and even limited applications can greatly reduce the number of ticks. A single springtime application of acaricide can reduce the population of ticks that cause Lyme disease by 68–100%.
- Discourage deer. Removing plants that attract deer and constructing physical barriers may help discourage deer from entering your yard and bringing ticks with them.

Where can I get more information?

www.cdc.gov

www.dshs.state.tx.us

www.ticsys.tamu.edu (for tick identification)

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