



# Preventing Lyme Disease and other Tick-borne illnesses



**Why Do Ticks Bite?** Ticks are spider-like creatures that need a blood meal to survive. When a tick bites, it can remain attached for several days.

**Why Is It Important To Prevent Tick Bites?** Ticks are capable of transmitting diseases to animals and humans if they are infected with a disease. The most common tick-borne illness in New York State is Lyme disease. Other diseases include anaplasmosis and babesiosis.

**What Is Lyme disease?** Lyme disease is caused by a bacteria transmitted by the deer tick. Early symptoms of the illness include: flu-like symptoms; an expanding, circular rash; fatigue; and body aches. If untreated, cardiac, neurologic problems, and even chronic arthritis may develop.

**What Do Deer Ticks Look Like?** Nymphal deer ticks are black, and the size of a poppy seed. Adult females are black and red-orange, and the size of a sesame seed. Males are all black and smaller. Ticks filled with blood ("engorged") are many times larger and turn gray.

**Where And When Are Deer Ticks Found?** Deer ticks are found in woodland areas, as well as grassy or brush habitats, including lawns and parks. Ticks are most active during May, June, and July, when most cases have symptom onset.

**Who Is At Risk Of Being Bitten By Deer Ticks?** Anyone who lives or works near wooded or grassy areas in the Hudson Valley is at risk. Activities such as hiking, gardening, and hunting, (as well as some occupations), may also expose you to tick bites.

**What Do I Do If I Find An Attached Tick?** When a tick bites, only the mouthparts are inserted into the skin. It is not likely that you will feel the bite. If you find an attached tick, do not squeeze the body or apply anything to the tick to remove it. Grasp the mouthparts with fine-tipped tweezers as close to the skin as possible. Pull out steadily and firmly. Sometimes the mouthpart will break upon removal, but they are not capable of transmitting disease. Remove the mouthparts as you would a splinter, and apply antiseptic. Make note of the date the tick bite happened and contact your physician if symptoms occur.

**How Do I Prevent Tick Bites?** It's a good idea to take preventive measures against ticks year-round, especially during warmer months (April-September) when ticks are most active.

**Avoid Direct Contact with Ticks.**

- Avoid wooded and bushy areas with high grass and leaf litter.
- Walk in the center of trails.

**Repel Ticks with DEET or Permethrin.**

- Use repellents that contain 20-30% DEET (N, N-diethyl-m-toluamide) on exposed skin and clothing for protection that lasts up to several hours. Always follow product instructions. Parents should apply this product to their children, avoiding hands, eyes, and mouth.
- Use products containing permethrin to treat clothing and gear, such as boots, pants, socks, and tents. It remains protective through several washings. Pre-treated clothing is available and remains protective for up to 70 washings.
- Repellents registered by the Environmental Protection Agency may be found at <http://cfpub.epa.gov/oppref/insect>

**Find and Remove Ticks from Your Body.**

- Bathe or shower within two hours after coming indoors to wash off and more easily find ticks that are crawling on you.
- Conduct a full-body tick check using a hand-held or full-length mirror to view all parts of your body upon return from tick-infested areas. Parents should check their children for ticks under the arms, in and around the ears, inside the belly button, behind the knees, between the legs, around the waist, and especially in their hair.
- Examine gear and pets. Ticks can ride into the home on clothing and pets, then attach to a person later, so carefully examine pets, coats, and day packs.
- Tumble clothes in a dryer on high heat for an hour to kill remaining ticks. Set the dryer for ten minutes if clothes are dry; one hour if they are wet.

**What Should I Do If I Think I Have Lyme disease?** The precautions mentioned above reduce, but do not eliminate, the chances of being bitten by ticks. If you develop symptoms, see your physician. Doctors use a combination of history, physical examination, and lab tests to diagnose Lyme and other tick-borne diseases. Lyme disease and other tick-borne diseases can be treated with antibiotics, especially when detected early.

**What Is Dutchess County Doing About Lyme disease?**

The Dutchess County Department of Behavioral & Community Health takes an active role in educating the public about Lyme disease prevention and is continually monitoring local cases. Call the Tick Information Line at (845) 486-3407 or visit [DutchessNY.gov/Ticks](http://DutchessNY.gov/Ticks).

