

October 14, 2021

Be Alert, Ticks are still Lurking!

The Bedford Health Department wants to remind residents that tick season is far from over! It is important to continue with preventative measure for tick bites. Ticks are active during warm weather, generally late spring through fall and tend to be most active in April and October. Do remember ticks can also be out any time that temperatures are above freezing. You don't have to be walking in the woods to be bitten by a tick; it can happen around your own home too.

Most ticks go through four life stages: egg, six-legged larvae, eight-legged nymph, and adult. After hatching from the eggs, ticks must eat blood at every stage to survive. Dr. Sam Telford, an esteemed scientist at the Tufts Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine, has provided informative talks related to tick borne diseases in the Town of Bedford in past years. He has explained the complex life cycle of deer ticks or "black-legged ticks", the most common tick found in Bedford. Dr. Telford explained deer ticks "are an arthropod, not an insect, *I. scapularis*, is an obligate blood-feeder and has a two year life-cycle. It is the adult tick that feeds on deer (or human) blood, the engorged female of which lays her thousands of eggs in leaf litter, sometime between October and the end of May, and then dies. The eggs mature during a spring warming period and hatch in mid-July into 6-legged larvae; the larvae themselves are not infected with *Borrelia burgdorferi*, the causative agent of Lyme disease. The larvae attach themselves to a small animal, probably near their hatching location, consume a blood meal that will carry them to the next stage of development, and drop back into forest litter to winter over and molt into the next stage, the 8-legged nymph." Dr. Telford further explained "The nymphs must go through one more molt to emerge as adults by fall, find another blood meal, this time on a larger host, such as deer or humans, and possibly pass on *B burgdorferi* if infected."

During this fall season, it is important to remember to continue with preventative measures for tick bites by protecting yourself and your property. Ticks can live where grassy yards border wooded areas, ornamental plantings and gardens, or anywhere it is shaded and there are leaves with high humidity. Ticks are generally found near the ground, in brushy or wooded areas. They can't jump or fly. Instead, they climb tall grasses or shrubs and wait for a potential host to brush against them. When this happens, they climb onto the host and seek a site for attachment.

While removing leaf litter from around your home is a great way to remove or reduce conditions that allow ticks to survive in your yard, it is important to remember you can be exposed to ticks while doing this seasonal activity. Deer ticks in Bedford can carry tick-borne diseases that are prevalent in our area, including Lyme, Anaplasmosis (Ehrlichiosis), and Babesiosis. These diseases, if transmitted from the tick to a human via a tick bite, can seriously impact an individual's health and lifestyle.

Prevention begins with you!

Create a Tick Free Zone

This fall, follow these tips to create a tick free zone to reduce your exposure at your home:

1. Reduce the size of wooded areas and increase the size of your open lawn.
2. Shift children's play areas and lawn furniture away from any woods, shrubs, and undergrowth.
3. Create a three-foot-wide distance between your yard and wooded areas by using mulch, woodchips or gravel.
4. Regularly remove leaf litter and clear brush around homes.
5. Keep grass mowed and other vegetation trimmed close to the ground, about 2 inches or less.
6. Prune plants, shrubs, and bushes to let in more sunlight.
7. Decrease areas where small rodents may hide, nest or feed.
8. Employ the use of Tick Tubes. These are small biodegradable cardboard tubes filled with Permethrin soaked cotton which can be placed around your yard.
9. Click the link for a video on prevention steps:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L7m7BdKEIj8>

Protect Yourself During Outdoor Activities

Before heading out to rake leaves, remove brush this fall, or explore the outdoors, make sure you follow these tips to reduce your exposure to ticks that may carry disease:

1. Wear long, light-colored pants tucked into your socks or boots, and a long-sleeved shirt. This will help keep ticks away from your skin and help you spot a tick on your clothing faster.
2. Use a repellent with DEET (the chemical N-N-diethyl-meta-toluamide) or permethrin according to the instructions given on the product label. DEET products should not be used on infants under two months of age and should be used in concentrations of 30% or less on older children. Permethrin products are intended for use on items such as clothing, shoes, bed nets and camping gear, and should not be applied to skin. Other repellents, such as picaridin, oil of lemon eucalyptus and IR 3535, have also been found to provide protection against ticks. Additional information on choosing a repellent and how to use repellents safely may be found at: <https://www.mass.gov/service-details/tick-repellents>
3. Stay on cleared trails when walking or hiking, avoiding the edge habitat where ticks are likely to be.
4. Check for ticks daily and especially after you have been in a tick habitat. Check under the arms, in and around the ears, inside the belly button, behind the knees, between the legs, around the waist, and on the hairline and scalp. The shower is a great place to do a tick check!
5. If you do find a tick attached to your skin, don't panic. Remove it immediately using a pair of fine point tweezers to grip the tick as close to the skin as possible and pull straight out with steady pressure. Talk to your doctor if you develop a rash where you were bitten or experience symptoms such as fever, headache, fatigue, or sore and aching muscles.
6. Talk to your veterinarian about tick control options (tick collars, repellents) for your pets.

Additional information about tick borne diseases may be found on the Massachusetts Department of Public Health website at: <https://www.mass.gov/tick-borne-diseases> and The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website at:

https://www.cdc.gov/ticks/geographic_distribution.html . Additional tick borne disease related resources and fact sheets are also available by contacting the Bedford Health Department at 781-275-6507 or by accessing the Health Department website at: <https://www.bedfordma.gov/health-department>.