

Bedford Health Department

April 5, 2021

Spring Weather Brings Residents Outside... and Ticks Too!

Many residents are spending more time around their homes, adhering to COVID-19 safety protocols, while awaiting eligibility to receive the COVID-19 vaccine. Spending more time at home is leading residents in search of fresh spring air and outdoor activities while continuing to maintain social distancing. The Bedford Health Department would like to remind residents that tick season is upon us and with the nice weather you may be spending more time in potential tick environments.

Ticks do not fly or jump. They attach to animals or people that come into direct contact with them. Deer ticks and dog ticks are found throughout Massachusetts; Lone Star ticks are also found in some places in Massachusetts.

Black-legged ticks, sometimes called deer ticks, are responsible for spreading Lyme disease, babesiosis, anaplasmosis, borrelia miyamotoi, and Powassan virus. Both nymph (young) and adult black-legged ticks will bite humans. The highest risk of being bitten by this kind of tick occurs throughout the spring, summer and fall seasons. However, adults can also be out searching for a host any time winter temperatures are above freezing. Black-legged tick nymphs are the size of a poppy seed and adults are the size of a sesame seed.

Dog ticks are responsible for spreading Rocky Mountain spotted fever and certain types of tularemia. In general, only the adult dog tick will bite humans. The highest risk of being bitten by a dog tick occurs during the spring and summer seasons. Adult dog ticks are about the size of a watermelon seed.

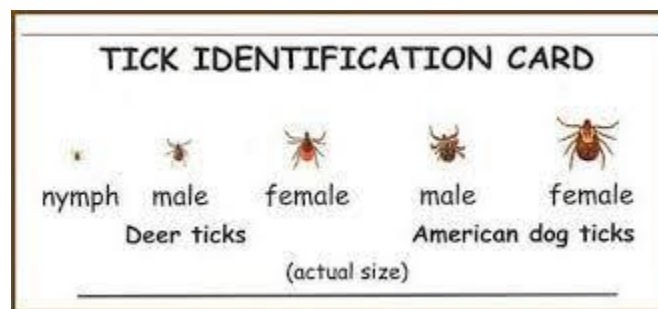
Lone star ticks are not a significant source of human illness in Massachusetts at this time but are capable of spreading tularemia, ehrlichiosis and southern tick-associated rash illness (STARI). Lone star tick saliva can be irritating but redness and discomfort at a bite site does not necessarily indicate any infection. Exposure to Lone Star tick saliva has been shown to cause an allergy to red meat in some people. The nymph and adult females most frequently bite humans.



According to the University of Rhode Island Tick Encounter website, the following 5 Tick Smart activities can help to protect you from Spring ticks: TUCK pants in socks, SPRAY shoes with permethrin, PROTECT pets, STAY in the center of paths and CHECK for ticks daily.

The Health Department is already receiving reports this spring that residents have found deer tick nymphs on their bodies after walks on the Bedford trails. However, you don't have to be walking in the woods to be bitten by a tick; it can happen around your own home or while out walking. Spring is a popular time for spring clean-up activities in many yards; ticks tend to be hiding under leaf litter that may have been created, resulting in the ideal environment for a tick.

Deer ticks are the most common tick we see in Bedford and can transmit disease to a human or pets via a tick bite. Deer ticks tend to live where grassy yards or fields border wooded areas, ornamental plantings, and gardens, or anywhere it is shaded and there are leaves. Deer ticks are typically small and range in size from a poppy seed to a sesame seed. Taking personal precautions against tick bites should be taken anytime you enter a potential tick environment such as your backyard, while doing yard work, in a grassy area, wooded area or a hiking/walking trail.



Create a Tick Free Zone During Spring Clean Up:

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



Not Tick Safe



Tick Safe

Tips to Protect Yourself Against Tick Bites:

- Use an EPA approved insect repellent, like one containing DEET, picaridin, or IR3535 directly on skin for protection that lasts a few hours.
- Spray your clothing and shoes with Permethrin which can kill ticks upon contact. Permethrin is not to be used directly on skin.
- When out in a recreational environment, stay in the center of trails and avoid areas of overgrown bush or grass.
- Wear light colored clothing so ticks can easily be seen.
- Do a Tick Check. Check yourself, children, and pets for ticks daily and shower after returning indoors. Your fingertips are a good detector of ticks that may be on portions of your body that you cannot readily see. Click the link for an easy tick check guide: <https://www.mass.gov/doc/how-to-do-a-tick-check-0/download>
- When you return home from being outside in a potential tick environment, place your clothes in a hot clothes dryer for 15 minutes (do not wash first).
- Check dogs and cats for ticks frequently and ask your veterinarian about tick preventives for pets.

How to Properly Remove a Tick:

- Always remove ticks promptly.
- Use tweezers to grab the tick's mouth at the surface of the skin.
- Gently pull the tick straight out with a steady motion.
- Clean the area.
- Do not squeeze the tick.
- Clean the area with antiseptic and wash hands afterwards.
- Call your doctor if you get a rash, fever or flu-like symptoms after a tick bite
- Click the link for a helpful video on how to safely remove ticks: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JNSDrnufHLA>

Physical activity, fresh air, and getting out of the house are all important. While out enjoying fresh air and the warmer weather, take tick bite preventive action and continue taking the necessary

precautions to protect yourself and others against COVID-19. Always remember to wear a face covering, maintain social distance, wash your hands frequently, get a vaccine when you are eligible and get tested regularly. It is important that we all continue to do our part to slow the spread of COVID-19 by continuing to follow all necessary prevention measures while experiencing some of the freedoms that come with more of the population being vaccinated.

For helpful information on tick bite (tick disease) prevention, tick identification and a calendar of tick tips, the University of Rhode Island's Tick Encounter website is a great resource: <https://web.uri.edu/tickencounter/>

For additional information on tick bite prevention and COVID-19 information, please visit the Bedford Health Department website <https://www.bedfordma.gov/health-department> or call 781-275-6507.