



TICKS

Ticks in Tennessee: What you need to know about tick-borne illnesses

What kinds of ticks do we have here?

As many as 15 tick species live in Tennessee, but the four most common are the blacklegged tick, commonly called the "deer tick"; the Lone Star tick; the brown dog tick; and the American dog tick, sometimes called the "wood tick."

Entomologist Dr. Rebecca Trout-Fryxell of the University of Tennessee Institute of Entomology and Plant Pathology said the [invasive Asian longhorned tick](#), which has both male and female reproductive parts and can reproduce without mating, has been recently found on animals in Knox, Roane and Union counties.

Trout-Fryxell said the tick, first discovered two years ago on sheep in New Jersey, is still fairly uncommon in Tennessee and seems more prone to bite animals than humans, but researchers are still learning about it.

What diseases do ticks in Tennessee carry?

The American dog tick can carry tularemia and Rocky Mountain spotted fever. Adult females are the most likely to bite people, usually during spring and summer.

The deer tick can transmit Lyme disease, ehrlichiosis and a host of other diseases. Both nymphs and adult females will bite people anytime the temperature is above freezing.

The brown dog tick carries Rocky Mountain spotted fever and usually bites dogs, but will bite other mammals — including humans.

The [Lone Star tick](#), distinguished by a white dot on its back, carries the germs that cause ehrlichiosis, Heartland virus, tularemia and STARI, and is very aggressive. In addition, its saliva can irritate the skin even if it doesn't cause infection. It can also cause an allergy to red meat.

What's the best way to remove a tick?

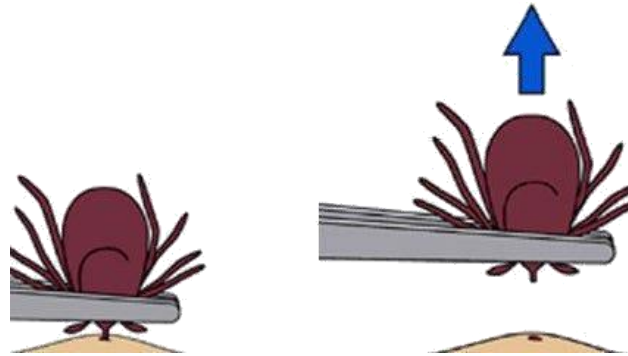
Get some tweezers and grab the tick as close to the skin as possible. Don't pull on the soft main body of the tick, but on its solid mouthparts. Pull straight up; don't twist.

Don't "smother" a tick with strong chemicals. That can actually cause the tick to regurgitate on you.

"The key point is that you want the tick off you as fast as possible, so any method that involves waiting for the tick to detach itself is very poor advice," said tick expert Graham Hickling, formerly with the University of Tennessee's Center for Wildlife Health. "They actually cement themselves to your skin, so the 'nurse with the



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detergent swab' method only works if the tick isn't finally attached," in which case you can easily pull it off with tweezers or your fingernails anyway.

Trout-Fryxell said that after you remove the tick, you can seal it in a zipper sandwich bag and put it in the freezer in case you show symptoms of tick-borne illness later and need to show it to a doctor.

How can you avoid ticks?

If you're going to be out in wooded areas for extended periods of time, you might wear long pants tucked into socks or boots, and spray your clothes and shoes with the chemical permethrin, which repels ticks.

Permethrin can't be used on skin. The national Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends [insect repellents approved](#) by the Environmental Protection Agency, containing the chemical compound DEET, picaridin, IR3535, oil of lemon eucalyptus, para- menthane-diol, or 2-undecanone. Don't use oil of lemon eucalyptus or PMD on children younger than 3, and don't use any of them on infants.

Ticks like to hide in leaf litter, tall grasses and brush, and any trash in your yard, like mattresses or old furniture. They also feed on rodents, so stored wood or food that attracts rats or mice can bring ticks to your yard as well. Raccoons, deer and stray dogs can carry ticks into your yard, so a fence can help.

How do you find ticks?

You've been out all day. Those bugs can be tiny. How can you be sure they're not hitchhiking into your house where they could bite you later?

Check your clothing, then put them in a dryer on high heat for 10 minutes — or if you plan to wash them, do so in hot water.

Carefully check coats, backpacks, tents and other items for ticks. And don't forget to examine your pets!



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Take a shower within two hours of coming indoors; the CDC said that reduces your risk of getting Lyme disease and may reduce the risk of other tick-borne illnesses, too.

And after a shower is a good time to do a full-body check for ticks, using a mirror if necessary. Look under your arms, in and around your ears, inside your belly button, behind your knees, in and around your hair, between your legs and around your waist.

