

2017 Tick Season

Ticks seemed rough in 2016, but if ecologists' predictions are accurate, we haven't seen anything yet. According to CDC, 2017 is showing all the signs of being an explosive year for the tick population in the Northeastern US. How do they know? Mice.

The population of Lyme-carrying mice (not deer, as is widely assumed) is a prime indicator of how large the tick population, and corresponding number of Lyme disease cases, will be the following year. And in 2016, there was basically a mice plague in the Northeast, spelling trouble for the 2017 tick forecast.

Mice, which carry Lyme but are not affected by it, pass the pathogen to 95 percent of deer ticks (also called blacklegged ticks) that feed on them - a single mouse can have upwards of 50 ticks living on it. These ticks spread the disease around to deer, another big tick-carrying animal population, other animals, and, of course, humans and pets.

Lyme disease is caused by a bacteria that ticks transmit to humans' bloodstream through a bite. Symptoms start out as a red skin rash, fever, headache, and fatigue, which are often treated successfully with antibiotics. If Lyme isn't detected and treated early, it can spread to the muscles, joints, heart, and nervous system.

Cases of Lyme disease have tripled since the 1990s, and cases have turned up all across the US. Climate change is part of the reason Lyme is on the rise. Warmer winters make it easier for ticks to survive until spring, and a warmer climate overall means that ticks can expand their range of habitat. An increasing deer population plays a role, too.

Preventing tick bites

While it is a good idea to take preventive measures against ticks year-round, be extra vigilant in warmer months (April-September) when ticks are most active.

Avoid Direct Contact with Ticks

• Avoid wooded and brushy areas with high grass and leaf litter.

• Walk in the center of trails.

Repel Ticks on Skin and Clothing

• Use repellent that contains 20 percent or more DEET, picaridin, or IR3535 on exposed skin for protection that lasts several hours. Always follow product instructions and parents should apply this product to their children, avoiding hands, eyes, and mouth.

Use products that contain permethrin on clothing. Treat clothing and gear, such as boots, pants, socks with products containing 0.5% permethrin. It remains protective through several washings. Pre-treated clothing is available and may be protective longer.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has an online tool to help you select the repellent that is best for you and your family.

Find and Remove Ticks from Your Body

Bathe or shower as soon as possible after coming indoors (preferably within two hours) 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 dry clothes in a dryer on high heat for 10 minutes to kill ticks on dry clothing after you come indoors. If the clothes are damp, additional time may be needed.

If the clothes require washing first, hot water is recommended. Cold and medium temperature water will not kill ticks effectively. If the clothes cannot be washed in hot water, tumble dry on low heat for 90 minutes or high heat for 60 minutes. The clothes should be warm and completely dry.

For more detailed information on Ticks, visit the CDC website
<https://www.cdc.gov/ticks/index.html>