

Important Tick Information

Ticks wait for host animals from the tips of grasses and shrubs (not from trees). When brushed by a moving animal or person, they quickly let go of the vegetation and climb onto the host. **Ticks can only crawl; they cannot fly or jump.** Ticks found on the scalp have usually crawled there from lower parts of the body. Some species of ticks will crawl several feet toward a host. Ticks can be active on winter days when the ground temperatures are about 45° Fahrenheit.

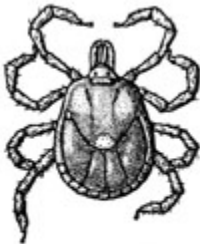


Top view of Hard Tick
(American Dog Tick)

American Dog Tick (*Dermacentor variabilis*)

One of the most frequently encountered ticks is the American dog tick, also sometimes known as the wood tick. The larvae and nymphs feed on small warm-blooded animals such as mice and birds. The adult American dog tick will feed on humans and medium to large mammals such as raccoons and dogs.

Unfed males and females are reddish-brown and about 3/16-inch long. Females have a large silver-colored spot behind the head and will become 1/2-inch long after feeding or about the size of a small grape. Males have fine silver lines on the back and do not get much larger after feeding. Males are sometimes mistaken for other species of ticks because they appear so different from the female.



Female Lone
Star Tick

Lone Star Tick (*Amblyomma americanum*)

The lone star tick is primarily found in the southern half of Illinois, although it can occasionally be found further north. Larvae, nymphs and adults will feed on a variety of warm-blooded hosts, including people. The larva is very tiny, only a little larger than the period at the end of this sentence. The nymph, the most common stage found on people, is about pinhead-sized. Adults are about 1/8-inch long and brown. The adult female has a white spot in the middle of her back. Because they are so similar in size, the lone star tick is sometimes misidentified by laypersons as the blacklegged / deer tick (see below).



Blacklegged
(Deer) Tick

Blacklegged Tick, also known as the Deer Tick (*Ixodes scapularis*)

All three active stages of the blacklegged / deer tick will feed on a variety of hosts including people. After the eggs hatch in the spring, the very tiny larvae feed primarily on white-footed mice or other small mammals. The following spring, the larvae molt into pinhead-sized, brown nymphs that will feed on mice, larger warm-blooded animals and people. In the fall, they molt into adults that feed primarily on deer, with the females laying eggs the following spring. Adults are reddish-brown and about 1/8-inch long (or about one-half the size of the more familiar female American dog tick).

Preventing Tick Bites and Disease

- Wear protective clothing such as long-sleeved shirts, long trousers, boots or sturdy shoes and a head covering. (Ticks are easier to detect on light-colored clothing.) Tuck trouser cuffs in socks. Tape the area where pants and socks meet so ticks cannot crawl under clothing.
- Apply insect repellent containing 10 percent to 30 percent DEET primarily to clothes. **Shoes socks and pants are the best places to apply repellent. Apply to clothing and allow to dry before wearing.** Use repellents containing permethrin to treat clothes (especially pants, socks and shoes) but not skin. Always follow label directions; do not misuse or overuse repellents. Always supervise children in the use of repellents.
- Check yourself, children and other family members two to three times each day for ticks. Before bed and after waking up are good times to check for ticks. **Be sure to check the whole body including the areas the sun doesn't shine, behind ears and along hair lines. Continue checking a few days after entering tick infested areas.** Most ticks seldom attach quickly and rarely transmit disease organisms until they have been attached four or more hours. If your pets spend time outdoors, check them for ticks, too.
- If ticks are crawling on the outside of clothes, they can be removed with masking tape or cellophane tape. A ring of tape can be made around the hand by leaving the sticky side out and attaching the two ends. Ticks will stick to the tape which can then be folded over and then placed in the trash.
- **Remove any tick promptly.** The mouthparts of a tick are barbed and may remain embedded and lead to infection at the bite site if not removed promptly. **Do not burn the tick with a match or cover it with petroleum jelly or nail polish. Do not use bare hands to remove the tick because tick secretions may carry disease.** The best way to remove a tick is to grasp it firmly with tweezers as close to the skin as possible and gently, but firmly, pull it straight out. Do not twist or jerk the tick. If tweezers are not available, grasp the tick with a piece of tissue or cloth or whatever can be used as a barrier between your fingers and the tick. Ticks can be safely disposed of by placing them in a container of soapy water or alcohol, sticking them to tape or flushing them down the toilet. If you want to have the tick identified, put it in a small vial of alcohol.
- Wash the bite area and your hands thoroughly with soap and water and apply an antiseptic to the bite site.
- If you have an unexplained illness with fever, contact a physician. Be sure to tell the physician if you have been outdoors in areas where ticks were present or traveled to areas where tick borne diseases are common.