

Public Health Fact Sheet - Steps You Can Take To Prevent Tick Bites

How can I protect myself and my family from tick bites?

There is no vaccine available to protect against Lyme disease or other diseases spread by ticks. The only way to protect yourself is to prevent ticks from biting you. If you live, work, or spend leisure time in an area likely to have ticks:

- The single most important thing you can do is check yourself for ticks once a day. Favorite places ticks like to go on your body include between the toes, the back of the knees, the groin, the armpits, the back of the neck, along the hairline, and behind the ears. Remember to check your children and pets too;
- Remove any attached tick you find with a fine point tweezers, grasping the tick as close to the skin as possible and pulling straight out with steady pressure;
- Stick to main pathways and the center of trails when hiking;
- Wear long-sleeved, light colored shirts and long pants tucked into socks. This helps keep ticks off you and makes it easier to spot them;
- For your skin, you can use a tick repellent with no more than 30% DEET. Choose a product that will provide sufficient protection for the amount of time spent outdoors. Product labels often indicate the length of time that someone can expect protection from a product. Products containing DEET should not be used on children less than 2 months of age and should be used in concentrations of 30% and lower for older children and adults. Never put repellents on the hands and face of young children. Use repellents according to the manufacturer's recommendations;
- Products containing permethrin kill ticks, but these products should be applied to clothing and not directly to skin. Clothing should be treated and allowed to dry in a well-ventilated area prior to wearing;and
- Place patio furniture, swing sets, etc. away from the wooded sections of your property.

How can I reduce the number of ticks around my home?

You don't have to be walking in the woods to be bitten by a tick. You can be in your own backyard! You can reduce the number of ticks around your home by:

- Keeping grass cut short;
- Removing leaf litter and brush from around your home;
- Pruning low lying bushes to let in more sunlight;
- Keeping woodpiles and birdfeeders off the ground and away from your home;
- Keeping the plants around stone walls cut short
- Using a three foot woodchip, mulch or gravel barrier where your lawn meets the woods;
- Asking your landscaper or local nursery about plants to use in your yard that do not attract deer;
- and
- Using deer fencing (for yards > 15 acres).

If you chose to use a pesticide to reduce the number of ticks on your property, hire a licensed applicator experienced with tick control. Your local landscaper or tree specialist may be a licensed applicator. In general, good tick control can be achieved with no more than two pesticide applications in any year. When selecting an applicator, you can ask if they will provide:

- A written pest control plan that includes information on the pesticide to be used;
- Information about non-chemical pest control alternatives; and
- Signs to be posted around the property after the application.

For information about diseases spread by ticks, contact the MDPH Division of Epidemiology and Immunization at 617-983-6800 or visit their website at www.state.ma.us/dph.

For information about the active ingredient in a repellent or pesticide, contact the National Pesticide Information Center at 1-800-858-7378 or visit their website at npic.orst.edu.

Prevention Begins With You