

Ticks and Lyme Disease

Concord Board of Health

March 2006

Lyme Disease and Our Community

Idyllic rolling hills, forests and pasture land are what make Concord a beautiful place to live and play. It is also a prime habitat for ticks. Ticks can be found in grassy or wooded areas, and even in your own backyard. An estimated three quarters of all Lyme disease cases are acquired from ticks picked up during activities around the home.

You may feel alarmed by the growing number of Lyme disease cases within our community or perhaps you may be dismissive - "it won't happen to me". The Board of Health's goal is to educate and be pro-active. Just as you have become vigilant about applying sunscreen and avoiding mosquito bites, you now must inform yourself about tick borne diseases.

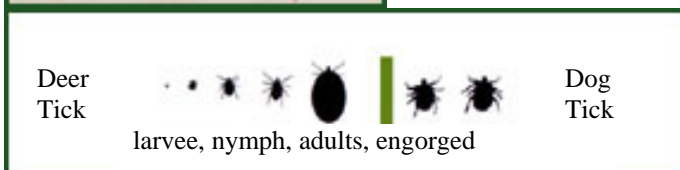
There are two types of ticks found in our area, the American Dog Tick and the Deer Tick. Only Deer Ticks can pass the Lyme virus. Adult Deer Ticks are quite small and the nymph is the size of the head of a pin.

Preventative measures should be observed year round with special attention taken May through October, when tick activity is at its highest. Ticks are active when the weather is above freezing, even in the winter. Prompt removal of a tick will greatly reduce the chances of the tick transmitting the virus. Therefore, checking for ticks and prompt removal of attached ticks is the single most important and effective method of preventing infection.

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Female Deer Tick (left)
Female Dog Tick (right)



Prevention Begins with You

Six Simple Steps You Can Take to Protect Yourself

There is currently 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 attaching themselves to you. If you live, work, or spend leisure time in an area likely to have ticks, following the suggestions below will greatly reduce your chances of contracting Lyme disease.

- The single most important thing you can do is check yourself for ticks once a day. Favorite places ticks like to hide 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 fine point tweezers. Grasp the tick as close to the skin as possible pulling it 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 to keep ticks off your skin 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 it. Products containing DEET should not be used on children less than 2 months of age and should only 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 only 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.

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Lyme disease is an infection caused by bacteria. The bacteria are transmitted to humans by the bite of infected deer ticks. The infection can cause joint, heart and nervous system problems if not recognized and treated early.

If you develop a rash, headache, or flu like symptoms after being bitten by a tick, contact your physician as soon as possible. Lyme disease can be treated with one of several antibiotics. Patients treated in the early stages usually recover rapidly and completely with no long term complications.

In 2002, Massachusetts had the fifth highest incident rate for Lyme disease nationwide. The number of reported cases in Concord continues to rise. There were 32 reported cases of Lyme disease in 2005, the highest in 6 years. The Board of Health's goal is to bring the number of human cases down through increased awareness and preventative measures.

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Additional Information

Mass Department of Public Health:
Tick Borne Disease Website @

www.mass.gov/dph/cdc/epii/lyme/lymehp.htm

Concord Health Division (978) 318-3275

Tick ID Cards (available at Health Dept.)

For safe-guarding your pet contact your local veterinarian

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

Eight Simple Steps to Protect Your 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.
- Place swing sets, patio furniture, etc, away from the wooded sections of your property.
- 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.
- Using deer fencing (for yards \geq 15 acres).



nymph and adult deer tick on a finger