



## Entomology Insect Information Series

***Providing Leadership in Environmental Entomology***

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### TICKS AROUND YOUR HOME

Ticks are closely related to scorpions, spiders and mites. They are not insects. They are external parasites that need a blood meal to survive and reproduce. Ticks can feed on humans and other mammals, reptiles, birds or even frogs. All life stages of ticks feed on blood. Ticks can transmit several diseases, such as Lyme disease, rocky mountain spotted fever, tick paralysis, and others, but most tick bites do not result in illness.

**Life Cycle.** Ticks have a simple life cycle. Eggs hatch into six-legged larvae, an immature stage. Depending on the kind of tick, the larva can be extremely active or lay in wait for a host to come. Once on the host, the larva will begin feeding. After the tick is full of blood, it will either fall off the host or stay on, depending on the type of tick. The next step for the tick is to turn into a nymph. From this point on, the tick will have eight legs. Some ticks go through many nymphal stages, while some only have one. The nymph will have a blood meal at every stage. After the nymph goes through all of its stages, it will turn into an adult. The adult will either stay on the original host, or find a new one if the nymph dropped off after feeding.

**Types of Ticks.** There are about 80 different kinds of ticks in the United States. Most of them are not associated with humans or their pets. The information presented here will help you understand what to do if you encounter one of the wood ticks or the brown dog tick in or around your home.



Deer Tick  
Photo Source: Iowa State Univ.

**Wood ticks.** The name wood tick is used for many ticks including the blacklegged or deer tick, lone star tick and American dog tick. These are usually found in woodland areas. If a home is built in an

area that was recently a field or forest, there is a higher chance that these ticks will be close-by. They crawl around for several hours often before attaching themselves to a host, so they may be accidentally brought into a home on pets or clothing. Wood ticks do not establish populations indoors.

**Brown dog tick.** The brown dog tick can be a nuisance in the home. It is one of only a few ticks that will infest a structure. The brown dog tick prefers to feed on dogs, but will occasionally feed on other hosts, such as humans.



Brown Dog Tick

They usually are found only where dogs occur. They can be picked up in such common places as infested homes, kennels, veterinarian's office, or outdoor areas frequented by an infested animal. On the animal, the larval and nymphal stages of the tick are normally found in the long hair along the back of a dog. The adult stage is found in the ear or between the toes. When an infestation occurs indoors, ticks will be found in cracks, crevices, behind baseboards and in other protected places close to the floor. Since the brown dog tick and adult female can lay as many as 5,000 eggs, the infestation can be very large.

**Prevention is the Key to Control.** The best way to avoid tick bites and the diseases they may carry is to avoid ticks. The best way to do that is to avoid places where ticks live, such as wooded areas. That is not always possible, but precautions can be taken. Long-sleeved shirts, long pants and hats should be worn when in tick-infested areas. Ticks are easier to detect when you wear light-colored clothes. To prevent ticks from getting under plants, you should tuck cuffs into the

socks or shoes. Tuck long hair under a hat. Also, tick repellent can be applied to the outside of clothes, especially the pants.

Do visual inspection of your clothes and body twice a day when in tick-infested areas. The larvae and nymphs of ticks are quite small and can be easily mistaken for freckles or dirt. Ticks like to feed on the back of the head at the base of the skull. It is a good idea to have another person check for ticks in places you cannot easily see. All clothing should be washed in warm water and detergent. If your pets accompany you to the woods, check them too.

**Non-chemical Control.** If you are having problems with rodents or other wild animals, such as raccoons or opossums, take measures to exclude them from your house or yard. Also, keep shrubs trimmed along the paths near your home. Keep grass mowed, and remove weeds, brush and leaf litter close to your house to reduce tick problems.

**Chemical Control.** Indoor chemical control of ticks is usually not recommended except for brown dog tick. Other ticks will not establish inside. In the case of the brown dog tick, applications should be limited to crack and crevice treatments, and areas where the animal spends the most time. Animal bedding or sleeping areas should receive special attention. Brown dog ticks will not be found in high places. Think about the brown dog tick as being at the level of the dog. You can use many of the same spray or dust products you would use for cockroach control to control brown dog ticks. Check the label for product that can be used in the same sites as those you need to treat. Always read and follow label instructions. At the same time that the home is treated for brown dog tick, also treat the animal with an approved product.

Outdoor treatments for any type of tick should be limited to those areas where pets spend the most time. Crawlspace, outdoor walls, cracks and crevices should only be treated if ticks are observed in these places. General treatments for ticks are not

recommended because they often are not very effective. Removal of tick habitats is much more helpful.

If you have a severe infestation in or around your home you may want to hire a professional pest control company to control your tick problem. Professionals can safely use products that are not available to consumers.

**Tick Bites.** As mentioned earlier, some ticks may transmit diseases. If a tick bites you, there are a few things that you should do. First, carefully remove the tick by grasping it with a pair of tweezers at the point closest to the skin. Pull it out slowly and steadily. After the tick is removed, disinfect the bite area. Also, make sure that you don't crush the tick because if the tick is infected, crushing it could introduce the disease into your body. Save the tick by placing it in a small container with rubbing alcohol. This way if you suspect a tick-related problem later on, the tick can be identified. Although, keep in mind, that to test the tick for disease, it must be kept alive. Finally, record the date on your calendar that you were bitten just in case symptoms appear later.

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Eiis/MV-5 (New 10/1998).