



Ticks: What to Watch For

Ticks can be easy to miss because they are tiny, and you often don't feel them bite. While the bite itself isn't always harmful, a tick feeding on your blood can transmit microbes that can cause Lyme disease and other serious illnesses.

Public health officials [report](#) that the 2026 tick season is shaping up to be the worst in a decade. With tick season in full swing, it's important to protect yourself against these bugs and know what to do when they attach themselves to you.

Why 2026 Is Different

Several factors are contributing to higher tick activity in 2026. Heavy winter snowfall acted as an insulating blanket, keeping ground temperatures warmer than usual and allowing more ticks to survive into spring. In addition, last year brought large quantities of acorns, which led to a rise in white-footed mice, one of the main hosts of blacklegged ticks, often called deer ticks. As these host populations grow, tick populations tend to increase as well. At the same time, blacklegged ticks are [expanding](#) into new areas of the country, putting more people at risk for tick-borne illnesses.

Early data suggest 2026 may be more severe than recent tick seasons. According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), emergency room visits for tick bites are higher than usual in many parts of the country, were 25% higher in April than the previous year. Meanwhile, Lyme disease cases are approaching 500,000 annually. These figures suggest that ticks are a growing public health concern; it's crucial to take precautions and stay alert during peak tick season.

Know Your Risks

Ticks are spider-like insects that live outdoors, usually in bushes, forests and other places with lots of vegetation. They survive by feeding on the blood of animals and sometimes humans. They are most active in spring and

summer, though some remain active as long as it isn't freezing.

Ticks can bite any part of your body and may cling to your skin and feed for hours if not removed immediately. They grow bigger and become more visible as they feed, falling off when full.

Ticks can transmit many types of illnesses, such as Lyme disease, Rocky Mountain spotted fever, anaplasmosis, babesiosis and Colorado tick fever. Many of these diseases can be treated with antibiotics and antiparasitic drugs, but early detection and treatment are crucial. If you find a tick attached to you, remove it immediately.

Preventing Tick Bites

Reducing your exposure to ticks is your best defense against tick-borne illnesses. Consider these steps to avoid tick bites:

Before you go outside

- **Know where to expect ticks.** Ticks usually live in grassy, brushy or wooded areas.
- **Wear a hat and light-colored clothing to spot ticks easily.** Consider wearing long-sleeved shirts and long pants tucked into boots or socks.
- **Treat clothes and outdoor gear with products containing 0.5% permethrin.** They kill ticks on contact and must not be applied to your skin.
- **Use an EPA-registered insect [repellent](#).** Read the product label and follow the manufacturer's guidelines for safe application.

After you come inside

- **Bathe or shower within two hours of coming indoors.** Showering helps wash off any attached ticks.
- **Do a full-body tick check.** Use a mirror to view all parts of your body, including your scalp, the area around your ears, underarms, waistband and the backs of your knees.

- **Tumble dry clothes for at least 10 minutes.** Drying clothes in high heat can kill any ticks that survive washing.
- **Check pets for ticks.** Dogs and cats can transport ticks into your home and may also get sick from tick-borne diseases.

If You Find a Tick

Any ticks attached to you must be removed as quickly as possible. The CDC says removing embedded ticks within 24 hours can help lower your risk of Lyme disease. Here's how health experts recommend you safely get rid of them:

- Clean the tick bite area with rubbing alcohol.
- Use a pair of clean tweezers to grasp the tick as close to your skin surface as possible.
- Pull the tick away with steady, even pressure. Don't twist or squeeze the tick; its head may break off.
- Thoroughly clean the bite area and your hands with soap and water, rubbing alcohol or hand sanitizer.
- Flush the tick down the toilet, or drown it in alcohol and cover it in tape before disposal.
- Note the date and monitor for symptoms for 30 days.

Don't use petroleum jelly, hydrogen peroxide, nail polish or salt to remove the tick. These methods don't work and might cause an infection.

The CDC advises seeing your healthcare provider if you develop a rash or fever within several weeks of removing a tick. During this visit, tell the doctor about your recent tick bite, when the bite occurred and where you most likely acquired the tick. Your healthcare professional will be able to advise you on the appropriate next steps.

Conclusion

It's important to watch out for ticks, as some of them carry diseases. Simple habits, such as wearing protective clothing and checking your body after spending time outside, can help lower your risk of tick-borne diseases. If you get a tick bite and develop symptoms of tick-borne illnesses, seek medical care promptly. You can also check the CDC's [page](#) for more information on ticks.

Contact your employer for additional resources.