

TICKS IN SASKATCHEWAN

Ticks are related to spiders and mites and have eight legs. In recent years the population of ticks in Saskatchewan has increased. Ticks population tends to increase in wet years and wet locations, as they need a certain level of moisture. The majority of ticks found in Saskatchewan are the American Dog Tick (also called the Common Wood Tick). Less than three percent of the ticks submitted for identification were the black legged tick (also called the Deer Tick). Black legged ticks have only been found in southern Saskatchewan in the Qu'Appelle valley. It is important when travelling to also remember that these ticks are found in parts of the United States and Canada.

 TickEncounter Resource Center

Derma-centor variabilis (American Dog ticks)



Black Legged Tick



In different stages of engorgement



The American dog tick is much larger (relatively speaking) than the black-legged or deer tick. The adult of the black legged tick is about the size of a sesame seed. The nymph stage of black legged ticks are very small (about the size of a pepper flake) and are very easy to miss when one is doing a tick check. In addition, the American dog tick has stripes on its abdomen and legs whereas the black-legged tick does not. The female black-legged tick also has a distinctive rusty brown abdomen.

Link for Tick identification: http://www.tickencounter.org/tick_identification/tick_growth_comparison

AVOIDING TICKS

Ticks live in grass and wooded areas. Ticks burrow part way into the skin, bite, draw blood, and then drop off. To protect yourself against tick and insect bites:

1. Walk on cleared trails wherever possible when walking in tall grass or woods.
2. Wear light colored clothing and cover as much skin as possible. Tuck your pants into your boots or socks and wear tight fitting shirts.
3. Put insect repellent containing DEET on.
4. Regularly check yourself, your family and household pets that go into tall grass and wooded areas.
5. Check clothing when leaving an area where ticks may live. Check in folds of skin. Have someone help you check hard-to-see areas. When a tick is located, remove it immediately. Check the whole body.
6. Remove clothes, shower and do a complete tick check
7. Wash and dry clothes. The dryer will kill all ticks left on the clothes.

DISEASE SPREAD BY TICKS

Most tick bites do not cause disease. However, several human diseases can be transmitted by tick bites. The most well-known is Lyme disease. Other illnesses include relapsing fever, tularemia, Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever (RMSF), and Q Fever. All of these diseases are not common in Saskatchewan.

Only very few-blacklegged ticks carry the bacteria that cause Lyme disease. Generally, a tick must be attached for one and half to two days before the Lyme disease bacteria can be transmitted.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF LYME DISEASE?

If you have the following symptoms within days or weeks after being bitten by a tick, please report them to your family doctor immediately. Tell your doctor when and where you were bitten by a tick.

1. General symptoms of fever, headache, muscle and joint pain, fatigue or weakness of the muscles of the face.
2. Skin rash, especially one that looks like a “Bull’s Eye”. It may or may not be where the bite was.

If you have Lyme Disease or another tick-related disease, you will need antibiotics to prevent complications of the disease.

WHEN SHOULD YOU REMOVE THE TICK?

Ticks should be removed as soon as possible. This prevents the transmission of any illness and prevents the tick from burrowing deeply into the skin. You should only remove a tick yourself, or get a friend or family member to remove it, if the tick is not buried very deep into your skin. If the tick has been on your skin for less than two hours, it will likely not be buried deeply into the skin. When a tick has buried itself deeply into the skin, see below (When To See a Doctor).

HOW TO REMOVE A TICK

Remove the tick right away (if possible, wear latex gloves when handling an engorged tick):

1. Use tweezers to gently grip the tick as close to the skin as possible.
2. Without squeezing the tick, steadily lift it straight off the skin. Avoid jerking it out. Try to make sure that all of the tick is removed.
3. Once the tick has been removed, clean the bite area with soap and water then disinfect the wound with antiseptic cream. Wash hands with soap and water.
4. If possible, save the tick in a container with a tight fitting top. If the tick is alive, dampen a small cotton ball and put it into the tick container to keep the tick alive. (A live tick is necessary for culturing the bacteria which causes Lyme Disease).
5. Ticks may be submitted for identification and testing, particularly if the tick is suspect of being a blacklegged tick.

Link to Lyme disease and identification of ticks in Saskatchewan:

<https://www.saskatchewan.ca/residents/health/diseases-and-conditions/lyme-disease>

WHEN SHOULD YOU GET A DOCTOR TO REMOVE THE TICK?

You should get a doctor to remove a tick when the tick has burrowed deep into your skin. This is because when a tick has burrowed deeply into the skin, it is difficult to avoid leaving mouth parts within the skin, which can cause an infection.