Ticks and Lyme Disease



USDA Forest Service Hoosier National Forest 7/2012

We don't have lions or tigers or bears on the Hoosier National Forest, but we do have ticks. Over the past 20-30 years the number of ticks on the Hoosier National Forest, especially in the area south of Interstate 64 has increased dramatically. Along with the increase in the numbers of ticks, is a growing problem with human diseases which are associated with ticks.

For many people, finding a tick latched onto their leg is enough to put a damper on a trip to the woods. It's like finding a mouse in the cupboard or a roach in your bed sheets, and leaves you feeling unaccountably paranoid. With recent publicity given to the threat of Lyme disease, people's fears have intensified and some are actually afraid to visit the forest.

Tick Demographics

Weather conditions seem to have the greatest effect on the density of ticks. After a mild winter tick populations are especially high. Ticks are worse in early spring when adults who have over-wintered start moving around looking for a host to feed on. Eggs from the previous year begin to hatch as well.

Ticks are not particularly choosy about their hosts. Any warm-blooded host will do. They climb up in brush and wait for a host to happen by. They attach themselves to the host and suck the host's blood, feeding only until they're full (6-13 days), then drop off and lay eggs. Incredibly, some ticks can survive up to two years between feedings.

A female tick lays from 4,000-6,000 eggs. After the eggs hatch, the tiny larvae or seed ticks, find hosts and feed just as the adults do. The larvae of some types of ticks are almost invisible to the human eye but literally hundreds can feed on one person resulting in painful itching and in some people, an allergic reaction. In most species, the larvae feed only on small mammals and are not a problem for humans.

There are over 800 species of ticks. Different species carry different diseases. Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever and Lyme Disease are two of the better known diseases spread by ticks. Some diseases, such as Lyme Disease may effect pets and livestock as well as people.

Avoiding Ticks

Ticks are going to congregate where they have a high chance of finding a host or where they hatched out as larvae. Any high traffic area should be avoided, including cow paths in pastures and deer paths in the woods. Also avoid tall grass and thick brush. If your pets roam into areas where they are likely to pick up ticks, routinely check them for ticks and use baths, dips, and flea and tick collars to reduce the chances of your pets bringing ticks into your home and yard.

Several commercial insect repellents work quite well. Insure the repellent has 20 percent or more of the ingredient DEET (for exposed skin - avoid hands, eyes and mouth) or PERMETHRIN (for clothing) to be most effective on ticks. In areas of high tick infestation, you'll need to apply it every 2-3 hours. Another proven method of repelling ticks is to sprinkle sulphur on your socks, boots, and pant legs.

For more Information Contact:

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Relay for the deaf and
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Tieing or taping your pant legs tight around your ankles so the ticks can't crawl up inside your pants and tucking in your shirt is also recommended. It won't cut down on the number of ticks you might get, but it will make them easier to spot and remove. Another suggestion is to wear light colored clothing which make the ticks easier to spot. Be sure and wash and dry all clothing promptly at a high temperature to kill any ticks that might remain.

Visitors to recreation areas are also encouraged to stay on mowed trails, walking in the center of those trails, where the chance of picking up ticks is less.

Diseases carried by Ticks

Once embedded, the recommended method of removing the tick is to pull it straight out with tweezers. Grasp the tick close to its head with tweezers and pull firmly. Wash the area and your hands thoroughly. Apply antiseptic to the bite. Remove a tick within 24 hours to lessen the chance of disease transmission.

You may wish to keep the tick for a few weeks in a vial labeled with the date and location of the bite. If medical attention is later sought, the type of tick has some bearing on the type of disease it might be carrying. For instance, it is the deer tick, much smaller than other common ticks, which is usually associated with Lyme disease. Deer ticks are mahogany brown, oval shaped, and appear to have two separate plates on their backs. Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever is carried by the Lone Star tick which is a round dark brown tick with a distinctive white mark on its back.

According to some researchers, "Lyme hysteria is vastly a bigger problem than Lyme disease". This may be true, but we recommend people be aware of the disease's symptoms. Several cases have been documented in southern Indiana. Two other diseases, ehrlichiosis and babesiosis have also been diagnosed which have symptoms similar to Lyme Disease and are easily treated. If the bite looks suspicious, you should see your local physician.

Symptoms of Lyme Disease may include:

- a red or pink rash, or a bump near the area bitten which expands in size and may become as large as 10-15 inches in diameter.
- fever, chills, headache, and fatigue
- enlarged lymph nodes
- stiff joints - usually the knees and neck

If these symptoms are present, a physician should be consulted immediately. Lyme disease can be confirmed by a blood test and progression of the disease can be prevented by proper treatment. For more information on Lyme Disease contact the American Lyme Disease Foundation, Inc., PO Box 466, Lyme CT, 06371 or email questions@aldf.com.

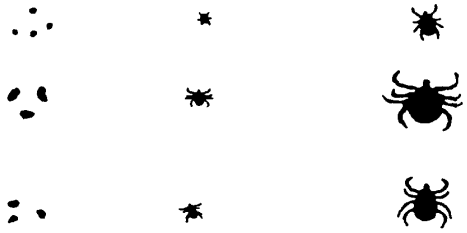
The symptoms will likely occur 1 to 8 weeks after a person is bitten by a tick.

Ticks shown actual size (size varies)

Deer tick

Lone Star tick

American



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