

## Tiny Ticks are Big Problem

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Ticks are my most hated pest. They sneakily wait for people and pets to walk by as they wait in ambush in tall grass. They carry numerous diseases, such as Rocky Mountain spotted fever and Lyme disease. And they will spend several hours feeding on our blood.

Ticks are not true insects, which have three body segments and six legs. Ticks are arachnids, a class of creatures related to insects. They have two body parts and, when mature, eight legs. This is important because, as they are not insects, many insecticides used to control them have little effect.

The three main tick species found in southwestern Indiana include the American dog tick, the lone star tick, and the deer tick. All of these ticks can be found in grassy areas, especially if they are near wooded areas. All of them feed on multiple hosts at different stages of their development, including rodents, birds, and dogs. All of them carry various diseases that can affect humans and pets. Ask my office for a link to our publication on ticks to get more information on identifying the different ticks, and the various diseases they carry.

Tick control is difficult. Keep overgrown and heavy vegetation cleared and cut in tick-infested areas. Eliminate unnecessary vegetation around yards or property, along wood edges, or along the edges of trails and paths. Treating the yard with insecticides doesn't work well, due to ticks not being insects, and because the products available don't last very long.

For preventing outdoor tick exposure, avoid tick-infested areas, and wear protective clothing. Stay on established trails, and avoid brushing against vegetation. Wear light-colored clothing, long pants, and long-sleeved shirts so that ticks can be more easily seen. Tuck in your shirt, and pull your socks over the pant cuffs.

Apply an insect repellent to your shoes, socks, and pants. Effective tick repellents are those containing DEET or permethrin. Occasionally check yourself and your children for ticks, especially on the head, groin, and underarm area. Inspect pets after they have been outdoors, and remove ticks found.

If you do find a tick on you, don't panic. A tick is slow to attach itself to a person, and doesn't begin feeding (and transmitting diseases) for several hours. Use tweezers, and grasp the tick as close to the skin surface as possible. Pull upward with a steady, even pressure. Yanking the tick quickly can leave the head inside your skin, causing an infection. Don't squeeze, crush, or puncture the tick, and don't handle it with your bare hands. After removing the tick, flush it down the toilet, then disinfect the bite site and wash hands thoroughly with soap and water. Consult a physician immediately if a rash or flu-like symptoms develop.

For more information on ticks, contact the Purdue Extension Service at (812) 435-5287, and ask for publication E-71, "Ticks."