

Ticks and Lyme Disease

Protect yourself against these potentially dangerous insects

Summer brings warm weather and great hiking. Unfortunately, ticks appreciate the season as much as we do and they pose a serious threat to hiker health. Though ticks themselves seldom cause medical problems, the diseases they transmit can wreak havoc. Ehrlichiosis, Lyme disease and Rocky Mountain spotted fever are just a few of the tick-borne pathogens of which hikers should be aware.

Here are a few easy steps to prevent tick-borne illness:

- **Determine risk:** Spring and early summer are high-risk for ticks because ticks are in an earlier stage of their development, called “nymphs.” Nymphs often carry heavier loads of disease-causing pathogens, and are smaller and harder to spot. Tall grass and brush are higher-risk, too, because ticks can easily climb on to hikers.
- **Wear long and wear light.** Wear long-sleeve shirts and long pants of a light color. Lighter colors seem to attract fewer ticks and make the ones that do end up on you easier to spot. Lightweight nylon or polyester garments are almost as cool as shorts and protect from the sun as a bonus!
- **Seal the cracks.** Tuck your shirt into your pants and tuck your pants into your socks. Gaiters can add an additional level of protection and keep small rocks and dirt out of your shoes too.
- **Repel invaders.** Consider treating your clothing with a persistent repellent chemical called pyrethrum. This substance, applied to clothing, repels ticks and biting insects for up to two weeks. Some clothing comes already coated with this deterrent. Apply a repellent containing at least 30% DEET to all exposed skin.
- **Wash your hiking clothes.** As soon as you get off the trail, wash your hiking clothes and dry them in a hot dryer for an hour. The heat will kill any ticks.



- **Tick check.** Showering within two hours of leaving the trail will help wash off any ticks which haven't latched on. Using a hand-held or full length mirror, take this time to check yourself for ticks, especially checking armpits, hair, ears and behind the ears, belly button, behind the knees, and groin. Be sure to also thoroughly check your children and pets.
- **Remove any ticks.** If you do happen to find a tick on yourself, do not use the old trick of poking the tick with a hot match head until it comes out. *Do* use tweezers and grab the tick as close to the skin as possible and slowly pull it out. If you can't grab the head in the first go, make sure to pull it out before washing the bite with a disinfectant. View the CDC's easy-to-follow tick removal instructions and pictures: <http://www.cdc.gov/lyme/removal/index.html>.
- **Stay vigilant.** If you develop a fever, rash, muscle and/or joint aches, flu-like symptoms or become ill, be sure to mention to your doctor possible tick exposure. Lyme disease is very serious and can cause permanent damage in bones and the nervous system. Tick bites that develop a bulls-eye ring are infected and should be treated immediately.

