

ADULT HEALTH BULLETIN



MAY 2025

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THIS MONTH'S TOPIC

TICK PROBLEM PREVENTION



Spring has officially sprung in Kentucky, with flowers in full bloom and the horses off to the races! While we may be excited to get outdoors and enjoy the sunshine, the warm weather also draws out other critters ... ticks. Ticks are tiny arachnids that need to feed on blood to go through their life cycle, putting the ICK in tick. These critters can transmit microbes that can cause disease in people, pets, livestock and horses, and even wildlife. While not every tick bite will lead to disease, it can take just one bite in some circumstances. That is why reducing your risk of tick bites is important. You should include these simple steps outdoors, especially when working or playing in a "tick-risky habitat."

Ways to reduce your risk of tick bites

- Wear long pants.
- Wear tall socks with pants tucked in and taped OR wear tall boots with pants tucked into boots.
- Wear long sleeves when walking through thick brush or tall grasses.

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- Buy pre-treated clothing or treat clothes with permethrin.
 - If you treat your clothes, follow all label instructions and keep cats away from the wet clothing as it is toxic to cats when wet (but safe when dry!)
 - Re-treat clothing after the number of washes shown on the label.
- Use DEET or other repellents before going into a risky habitat.
 - Find the right repellent for you and your family members by using the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) tool: <https://www.epa.gov/insect-repellents/find-repellent-right-you>.
 - Remember to spray your socks and (non-rubber) boots!
- Do a tick check periodically while outdoors and soon after returning home.
 - It is easiest to do a full tick check in the shower; this will help dislodge any ticks that may not have fully attached yet.
 - Do a tick check on your pets too.
 - Focus on areas where ticks could find an easy blood meal — “hidden” locations and spots with increased blood flow are ticks’ favorites, such as the scalp, armpits, belly button, groin, behind the knees, and in between toes (especially on pets).
- Throw clothes in the wash, then the dryer, on HIGH heat.
 - Heating clothes on high for 10 to 15 minutes will kill ticks.

Take a “tick kit” with you while out and about. This will include items that help you locate, remove, and collect ticks and clean the bite site. When removing ticks, pull the skin tight, grab as close to the skin as possible with your tweezers, and pull straight up and out. Do NOT twist ticks to remove, that can break ticks and leave the mouthparts attached, potentially leading to infection.

Tick kit items

- Magnifying glass to find ticks

- Tweezers or forceps
- Bottle (a small pill bottle works well, with identifying information removed) or zip-top bag to keep ticks if you want them identified or tested
- Hand sanitizer or cleaning towelette to clean the bite site after removing the tick

Tick testing

Kentucky residents can send in ticks (found on people and pets) for testing by following instructions through the UK’s Tick Submission Program: <https://entomology.ca.uky.edu/ticksurveillance2022>

What makes a location “tick risky”?

While many different tick species live in Kentucky and prefer different habitats, they are generally found in “wilder” areas — think brush, tall grasses, or leaf litter. You can reduce your risk by walking in the middle of hiking trails, limiting time in tall grass and brush, and using personal protection measures when in these habitats.

But don’t let ticks keep you from enjoying all the beauty that Kentucky has to offer! Using a combination of these methods, you can reduce your risk of tick bites whenever you and your family are working or recreating outdoors.

For more information on reducing your tick and mosquito bite risk and creating “bite safe” spaces around your home, check out UK’s Extension Resources: <https://entomology.ca.uky.edu/ef618> and UK’s From the Woods Today series, episodes 212 and 214.

• **Episode 212:** https://youtu.be/pr2__iPdndI?si=z1u72TXK556QQAOL

• **Episode 214:** https://youtu.be/DNTXX_DIGA4?si=F-EsaDdTMW-XFdUT

Written by: Hannah Tiffin, Ph.D.,
Assistant Professor, Dept. of Entomology

Edited by: Alyssa Simms

Designed by: Rusty Manseau

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