

Tick Season is Revving Up So Protect Yourself

AGRI-VIEWS

by Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent

Even though spring is coming in fits and starts, it is coming and those who have been out and about are already relearning that they need to check for ticks after an outing. We are “blessed” with plenty of ticks in our area and in a spring with good rainfall, like this year, we will have lots of vegetation and lots of ticks.

While we have several species of ticks in Kansas, we are primarily concerned about two species in our area: the American dog tick and the lone star tick. These are the two species that you are likely to encounter. Both are common, in fact they are very common. When I’m out walking through vegetated areas I just expect that I will encounter ticks. Both tick species can carry diseases that are of concern. Many people are concerned about Lyme disease, understandably, but there are several others that should be of concern. Dealing with ticks and their possible bites comes down to a three prong approach: prevention, detection and removal, and monitoring for possible disease symptoms.

Far and away the best way to deal with a tick bite is not to get one. Some people accomplish this by not going outside. I don’t find this approach acceptable and many people have no choice but to work in areas where there will be ticks. Ticks hang out on vegetation and wait for a possible host to brush up against them so they can grab on and go for a ride. People think that ticks fall out of trees onto a host’s head, but that isn’t the case. When they hitch a ride on a person they instinctively crawl up until they find a suitable feeding location, which can be around the head some place.

The first step is treating of clothing and exposed skin with insect repellents. I focus on treatments from the waist down. Repellents containing DEET are effective on clothing and skin. There are also clothing only repellents that contain permethrin that are very effective, but only for use on clothing. Treat shoes, socks, and pantlegs. By the way, these treatments are also very effective against chiggers which will be showing up very soon now as well. Dusting sulfur is used by some people around the ankles and socks with good success. You can go a step further and tuck your pantlegs into your socks to keep the ticks on the outside as they crawl up. It makes it much easier to find them that way.

Once you come inside be sure to wash off insect repellents from skin, especially on children. Then check yourself and your children over from head to toe looking for any ticks. This time of year both species have small larval or first instar ticks. Larval lone star ticks can occur by the hundreds and swarm over clothing and skin. Duct tape works great for removing a bunch of these little ticks. For larger ticks that have well seated mouthparts you need to carefully but firmly grab the tick next to the skin and exert slight backwards pressure until they release their mouthparts. Don’t get impatient as it may take several minutes for them to let go. Don’t just grab and yank, you want to try to get all the mouthparts out.

Then monitor the area of the bite for a couple of weeks afterwards. If any unusual rashes or spots develop get to your doctor right away. This can be early indications of one of the diseases or merely an infection, but both need to be treated by a doctor and the sooner the better.

Ticks are a part of the great outdoors. They are kind of creepy to most folks and give others the shivers. But they shouldn’t make you a prisoner in your home. Take precautions, enjoy the great outdoors and just be on the lookout for them!