

Yes, It's Tick Season Again

AGRI-VIEWS

by Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent

I've had several people asking me if this year's tick season is worse than normal, possibly because of media reports or because they seem to be encountering a lot of ticks of late. We encountered our first tick clear back in March when it was still quite cool, which is honestly not that uncommon. I'm sure that some folks have felt that with the hot and dry weather of late there would be less of a tick problem this year, but that's never the case. In fact warmer than normal weather will cause ticks to develop faster.

We have at least eight tick species in Kansas. Most of them CAN carry some sort of vector borne illness. Fortunately, several are quite uncommon so we primarily are going to worry about American dog tick and lone star tick locally. It may sometimes seem like there are more than that because male and female ticks can look different as well as changes as they go through life stages from larva to nymph to adult. The small black-legged tick is rare this far west in Kansas. Most small ticks that people encounter, sometimes called seed ticks, are usually larva of the lone star tick.

There are easily over a dozen different pathogens that Kansas ticks could be carrying. Everyone knows about Lyme disease but that's the tip of the iceberg and may be one of the least common diseases. Fortunately many tick bites do not result in disease transmission. What's important to know though is that if a person does have an attached tick which is removed but they start feeling ill a few days later, they need to get to a doctor immediately. When possible it is also helpful if the removed tick is kept so it can be tested later if needed. There is a laboratory connected with the University of Massachusetts that can check ticks for pathogens. There is a \$50 per tick fee. Details can be found at www.tickreport.com.

Ticks do not drop from trees on your head. They are usually low in the vegetation where they grab on to something passing by and then start traveling up until they find a place to attach. Simple things like tucking pant legs inside of socks and keeping shirts tucked in to pants will keep ticks on the outside of your clothing where they are more easily found. If a tick is attached, use fine pointed tweezers, grab it right next to the skin and pull directly away from the skin, slowly and patiently. You want the tick to let go and it may take a while. Long star ticks have very long mouthparts and we often find that part of the mouthpart stays in the skin causing a reaction and frequently intense itching. Don't squeeze the body, don't use chemicals, don't use heat. Be patient and you will get it removed.

Because I use clothing treatments when I'm off the beaten path, I haven't encountered that many ticks on myself this year. But this points out the very important first line of defense against tick bites, use clothing and skin treatments. DEET and picaridin based insect repellents are the best to use on skin. For clothing I use one of the permethrin based products. Permethrin is not effective as a skin treatment. Then be sure to check yourself and children over thoroughly after you get back inside.

In yards you can use a lawn or garden insecticide to help reduce, not eliminate, ticks, fleas and chiggers. Use one that comes with it's own applicator so you can just connect it to the garden hose and spray without having to mix. Apply a good thorough soaking spray in the evening, then keep pets and children off the lawn until the dew dries the next morning.