

Don't Let Ticks Spoil a Day in the Woods

Whether hunting mushrooms, hiking, or simply enjoying nature, there is no better place to spend a Spring day in Adams County than the woods. Unfortunately, the woods also bring us in contact with ticks and exposure to serious diseases and health risks.

Ohio is home to three species of ticks—the American dog tick, the lonestar tick, and the blacklegged or deer tick—each of which can transmit disease to humans. The blacklegged tick, the tick associated with Lyme disease, is a relative newcomer to our state but is increasing in numbers dramatically. Almost absent from the state prior to 2009, it has been found in 57 Ohio counties and is established in at least 29 of them, one of which is Adams County.

The bacteria that cause Lyme Disease, the most common tick-borne disease in the U.S., live and develop in the white-footed mouse common in woodlands. The bacteria are passed to humans through the bites of infected blacklegged ticks. The infection begins in the skin at the site of the bite and may spread to affect the joints, heart, and nervous systems.

Key to protecting against Lyme disease and other diseases transmitted by ticks is prompt removal of the tick when bitten. This is no small task in the case of blacklegged ticks which are the size of a sesame seeds when young. Showering within a couple of hours after returning from the woods is a smart practice. Conduct a full-body check for ticks using a full-length or hand-held mirror after every outing.

If a tick is discovered, there is no cause for panic. It can take up to 36 to 48 hours after being bitten for infection to occur. Using fine-tipped tweezers, grasp the tick as close to the skin's surface as possible

and pull upward with steady, even pressure until it dislodges. Clean the bite area and your hands thoroughly with soap and water.

Preventing tick bites is the best defense against Lyme disease and other tick-related diseases. Wear a hat, long trousers, and long sleeve shirt when out in the woods or bushy areas with high grass and leaf litter. Tucking trouser-legs into socks and shirt-tails into trousers makes it harder for ticks to reach the skin. The use of insect repellents that contain 20 to 30 percent DEET (N, N-diethyl-m-toluamide) on exposed skin and clothing provides protection lasting several hours.

Spraying outdoor clothing with a 0.5% concentration of permethrin can provide long-term protection against ticks. The permethrin bonds to the fabric fibers for up to 6 weeks or 6 washings. When using any commercial product, be sure to always follow package instructions.

For more information, contact the Adams County Health Department at 937-544-5547.

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