

Tick season starting early this year

April 23 2012



Expert urges hikers, gardeners and others to know the signs of tick-borne diseases.

(HealthDay) -- Tick season has started earlier than normal due to the mild winter, which means hikers, gardeners and others who love the outdoors should take precautions to prevent becoming a meal for ticks, an expert says.

People also should keep alert for symptoms of tick-borne diseases.

In Minnesota, patients already are testing positive for tick-borne diseases such as [Lyme disease](#), anaplasmosis and babesiosis -- a month or two earlier than normal for the state, said Dr. Bobbi Pritt, a [microbiologist](#) and director of the Clinical Parasitology and Virology Laboratories at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minn.

Lyme disease and anaplasmosis both are caused by bacteria carried by ticks, while babesiosis is a parasite that infects [red blood cells](#).

But there are a number of things people can do to protect themselves from ticks.

"The first thing is just tick avoidance -- staying out of areas where ticks are going to be present: tall grasses, shrubs, [leaf litter](#)," Pritt said in a Mayo Clinic news release.

"Also use insect repellent, such as DEET," Pritt added. "You can also buy clothing that has been impregnated with [pyrethroids](#), which is another type of insect repellent, and there are certain types of insect repellents for pets."

Some other tips:

- Keep grass short in yards and don't go into overgrown areas.
- Wear long clothing to prevent ticks from accessing your skin.
- After spending time outdoors, thoroughly check yourself, your children and your pets for ticks.
- Stay on trails when you hike. If you leave the path, wear long pants tucked into your socks.
- If you find [ticks](#), remove them immediately. Pinch the tick near its mouth and pull it out slowly in a continuous motion. Don't twist the tick because doing so may leave mouth parts embedded in the skin.

Fever, headache and muscle pain can be signs of a tick-borne illness. A hallmark of Lyme disease is a bull's-eye-patterned rash. Even if you do not recall getting a tick bite but have been working outdoors or visited other tick habitats and develop such symptoms, make sure to mention

this to your doctor, Pritt said.

More information: The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has more about [ticks](#).

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Citation: Tick season starting early this year (2012, April 23) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2012-04-season-early-year.html>

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