

Ticks that can make you allergic to red meat are spreading

June 28 2017, by Max Londberg, The Kansas City Star

As if there weren't enough reasons to avoid ticks, a symptom can develop in which a bite from a certain kind of tick causes an allergic reaction to red meat.

A bite from the lone star tick, across the eastern half of the United States, can cause severe symptoms to develop after eating mammalian meat such as pork, beef and lamb. Symptom include hives, shortness of breath and can lead to an anaphylactic reaction. A bite can even be fatal, according to Ronald Saff, an allergist from Tallahassee, Fla.

Saff said the ticks are spreading, and global warming is contributing. Once confined to southeast and eastern states, they are spreading northward and westward.

"They like nice warm environments," he said. "As the U.S. gets warmer, we anticipate that the tick will migrate to other states."

Researchers at Kansas State found the species is spreading from the eastern part of Kansas, where it was once contained, to central and western Kansas. The College of Veterinary Medicine reported its findings in 2016, also citing a warming climate as a contributing factor.

The species is found in Missouri, too.

"It's one of the more common ticks," said Phil Needham, an agent with the Missouri Department of Conservation in Cass County. "It's not the

most prevalent tick, but they are encountered."

Once inflicted with the condition, an allergic reaction can develop after just a single bite of meat.

The odd thing about the reaction, Saff said, is that it doesn't develop until several hours after consuming meat. That can leave those who experience symptoms at a loss for what is causing them.

The condition was discovered about a decade ago and is slowly circulating through the medical world.

"This is relatively new," Saff said. "If you pick up a medical textbook ... you won't find anything on (this [allergy](#))."

Some [primary care physicians](#) may not even be aware it exists, Saff said, which may cause statistics of those affected to be underrepresented.

Several people a week come to Saff showing signs of the red meat allergy caused by a tick bite.

"It's a scary thing. This can kill people," he said.

None of his patients have died. The relative newness of the condition means it is still unknown if the allergy can remain in someone's system for life.

Ginger Brown, who lives outside Wichita, Kan., contracted the allergy after a bite from the lone star tick, according to The Wichita Eagle. Before being diagnosed, she ate meat with mild symptoms as a result.

"It's not a tragedy, but it's an annoyance," she said. "There are worse things that could have happened to me."

James Stanford, an infectious disease specialist at Truman Medical Center-Hospital Hill, said no recent cases of lone star tick bites have been reported in the region.

Ellen Dorshow-Gordon, an epidemiologist with the Jackson County Health Department, said tick-borne diseases are on the rise in some Missouri counties, and officials with the state health department will help with tick trappings to assess the number and types of ticks in given areas.

Saff said the red meat allergy passed by the lone star tick is so new that health agencies still do not track it. Dorshow-Gordon said it isn't tracked in her department.

The alpha-gal allergy, as the red meat allergy is known, is actually caused by a sugar molecule found in [meat](#) - galactose-alpha-1,3-galactose.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention writes the lone star tick is "very aggressive." The female is distinguished by a white dot or "lone star" for which the species is named.

The Missouri Department of Health offers a list of tips for preventing [tick bites](#):

- Wear light-colored long pants, long sleeves and socks treated with permethrin
- Apply insect repellents with 20-50 percent DEET on skin and clothing
- Children 2 months and older, use a repellent 30 percent or less DEET
- Use fine-tipped tweezers to grab an attached tick close to the skin and pull straight up with a steady motion until removed

- Check frequently for ticks

©2017 The Kansas City Star (Kansas City, Mo.)

Distributed by Tribune Content Agency, LLC.

Citation: Ticks that can make you allergic to red meat are spreading (2017, June 28) retrieved 19 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2017-06-allergic-red-meat.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.