



Barry-Eaton District Health Department

Be Active • Be Safe • Be Healthy

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Fight the Bite! Protect Yourself from Ticks this Summer

Ticks are one of summer's irritations, and sometimes their bites can become serious. Residents should know how to protect themselves from illnesses spread by ticks, such as Lyme disease.

Lyme disease is caused by bacteria and is spread through the bite of infected blacklegged ticks (also known as deer ticks). The range of the blacklegged tick in Michigan is growing, and ticks carrying Lyme disease have been found in 34 of 83 Michigan counties. Barry County has a known risk for Lyme disease, and Eaton County has a potential risk for Lyme disease. Other types of ticks are commonly found in Michigan and can spread other diseases to people.

Ticks can attach to any part of the human body but are often found in hard-to-see areas such as the groin, armpits, and scalp. In most cases, the tick must be attached for 36-48 hours or more before Lyme disease can be transmitted. Because of this, doing a full-body check to find and remove ticks after spending time outdoors is important. Ticks should be removed by grasping the tick with fine-tipped tweezers as close to the skin as possible and pulling upward with steady, even pressure; detailed instructions can be found at <https://bit.ly/2nSlO3S>.

It is recommended that ticks removed from people or engorged with human blood be submitted for identification. Ticks that are identified as blacklegged ticks and are still alive can then be submitted to the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) for Lyme disease testing. The Barry-Eaton District Health Department (BEDHD) can help with screening ticks and mailing them to MDHHS. Ticks can also be directly submitted to MDHHS. More information can be found at <https://bit.ly/2KmyeKq>.

If someone is bitten by a tick that is suspected or confirmed to be a blacklegged tick, they should call their healthcare provider. Symptoms of Lyme disease include fever, headache, and fatigue. Many, but not all, people will get a characteristic "bull's-eye" skin rash. If untreated, infections can become serious. Most cases of Lyme disease can be treated successfully with antibiotics.

Any time someone has been bitten by a tick, they should keep an eye on their health and contact their healthcare provider if they get ill, especially with fever, headache, body aches, or rash. They should be sure to tell their healthcare provider about their recent tick bite, when the bite occurred, and where they most likely came into contact with the tick.

To avoid being bitten by ticks, there are several ways people can protect themselves:

- Wear light-colored clothing so ticks can be spotted more easily and removed before they bite.
- Wear long-sleeved shirts and tuck pants into socks or boots. Wear boots or shoes instead of sandals, especially in areas by brush or long grass.
- Apply insect repellents with DEET to clothes and exposed skin and apply a permethrin product to clothes (this kills ticks on contact). Be sure to follow the manufacturer's instructions for use.
- Walk in the center of trails to avoid contact with overgrown grass and brush at trail edges.

- Bathe or shower as soon as possible after coming indoors (preferably within two hours) to wash off and more easily find crawling ticks.
- Conduct a full-body tick check using a hand-held or full-length mirror to view all body parts upon return from potentially tick-infested areas. Parents should check their children for ticks under the arms, in and around the ears, inside the belly button, behind the knees, between the legs, around the waist, and especially in their hair.
- Examine gear and pets. Ticks can ride into the home on clothing and pets, and then attach to a person later, so carefully examine pets, coats, and packs.
- Tumble clothes in a dryer on high heat for an hour to kill remaining ticks.

For more information on Lyme disease, visit www.michigan.gov/lyme. For tick-related questions, including questions about tick submissions, please call BEDHD's Environmental Health Division at 517-541-2615 (Eaton County) or 269-945-9516 (select 3, then 5; Barry County).