W1403

Preventing Tick Bites

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There are three to five commonly encountered tick species in Tennessee associated with tick-borne diseases (TBDs) that can negatively impact people and pets. While antibiotics are available for many of the TBDs, each person responds to pathogens differently, and the severity of the disease often increases if treatment is not started early. Because some pathogens can be transmitted quickly when a tick bites, it is important to know how to protect yourself before you are exposed.

Steps to Prevent Tick Bites

Before you go outside, you need to prepare yourself, any gear you are taking and your pet(s) to prevent tick bites.

- Plan your outdoor activities to avoid areas where ticks are likely to be such as shaded, overgrown, grassy and wooded areas. Stay in open, sunny areas where ticks are unlikely to be due to tick moisture loss.
- Consider packing an extra sticky lint roller to help you quickly remove ticks on clothing.
- Wear protective clothing such as light-colored long-sleeved shirts and long pants when in areas where ticks are active. The light colors make it easier to see ticks and remove them.
- If possible, treat your clothing and gear with permethrin as directed on the label or use permethrin-impregnated clothing. Note that cats are sensitive to permethrin and should not have access to areas where clothing and gear are being treated or stored.
- Use EPA-approved repellent and reapply if necessary and as directed on the label.
- Talk to your veterinarian about the best tick and mosquito prevention products for your companion animal(s). Use these products year-round as ticks can be active even in winter months.

The longer a tick is on your body, the more likely it is to attach to you, feed and potentially transmit a disease-causing pathogen resulting in a TBD. The sooner you find and remove the tick, the lower the risk. Regular inspection of your clothing for ticks and promptly removing them from your clothing or skin while outdoors will help reduce your risks. If you have a companion animal with you, do the same to prevent their risks and the risk of bringing ticks back into your home. While humans cannot acquire a TBD directly from their companion animals, their pets may accidentally bring ticks inside which can then bite you. **When you return from the outdoors**, there are several things you should do to prevent tick bites.

- Complete a thorough inspection of your body (hair, body creases and folds such as under armpits, behind knees and between the legs and toes), shoes, gear and pets for ticks (Figure 1).
- Shower within two hours after returning indoors. This may help you to see and remove ticks that you miss during your initial tick inspection. Thoroughly inspect yourself again after you get out of the shower. Use a mirror to inspect difficult to see areas.
- Dry your clothing and washable gear in a dryer on high heat to kill any ticks on those items. If you do not have access to a dryer, place your clothing and gear in a sealable bag to contain any ticks that might be hiding in and/or on those items. Drying your clothing first, then washing it as normal, will help quickly kill any loose ticks.

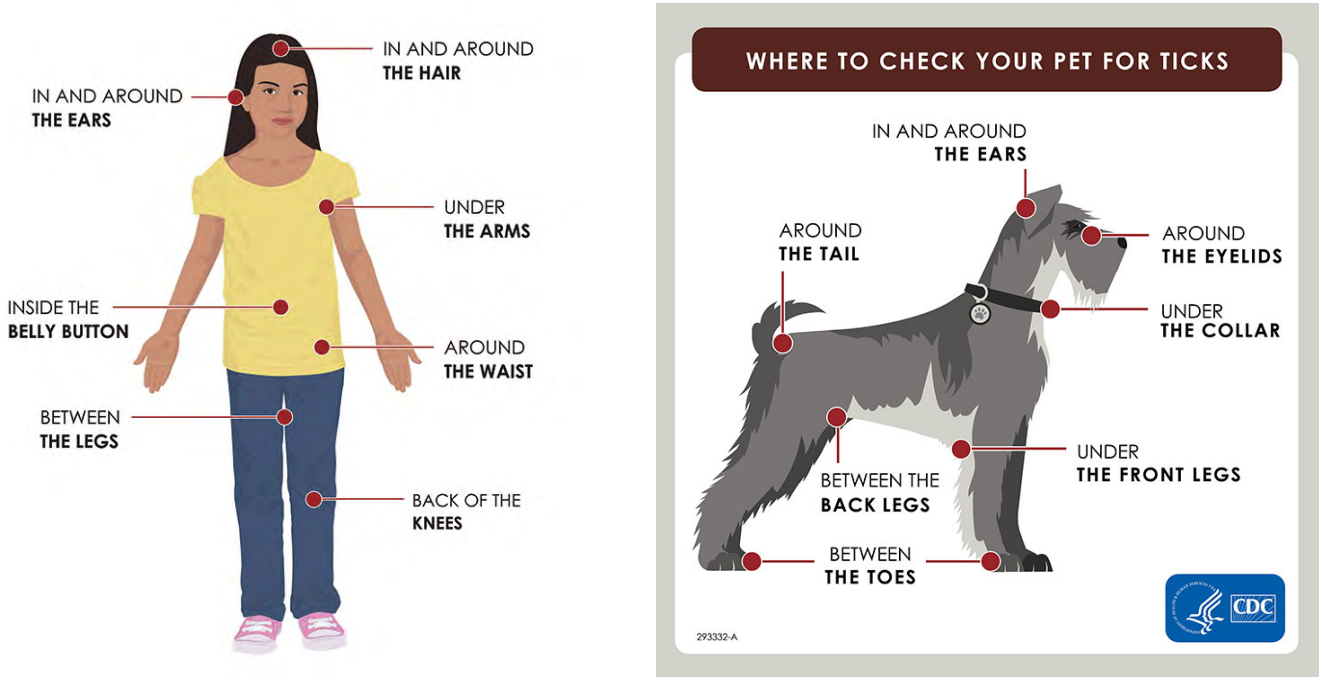


Figure 1: *Places to inspect for ticks on humans (left) and companion animals (right). Graphics Credit: The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).*

If you find a tick attached to you, remove it as soon as possible. UT Extension fact sheet W1404 Managing Tick Bites: What to do When a Tick Bites provides detailed instructions on how to remove a tick and when to see a medical professional.

Backyards may be a place where ticks are encountered. Urban backyards may be less of a risk for ticks compared to more rural areas. UT Extension publication W1405 Backyard Tick Control can help you determine your backyard tick risk and how to modify your yard to reduce your risks.

References and Online Resources

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