
Ticks - A Part of Summer in Nebraska

Ticks bother Nebraskans every summer. Despite the prevalence of these pests, many people do not know a lot about them. A little bit of knowledge makes it easier to avoid ticks and their itchy bites. Many people think ticks are insects, but they are actually close relatives of mites and spiders. Ticks crawl up and hang on to vegetation with their hind legs, extend out their front legs and grab on to animal hosts as they walk by.

Ticks have four stages in their life cycle: egg, larva, nymph and adult. They must find a host to feed on in the three active stages. Some tick species stay on the same host for all three stages, but others find a different host every time they feed. Most ticks in Nebraska are three-host ticks.

The American dog tick, also known as the Wood tick, is the most common tick in Nebraska and is found throughout the state. The American dog tick can transmit *Rickettsia rickettsii* a bacteria that causes Rocky Mountain spotted fever. Confirmed cases of Rocky Mountain spotted fever are rare in Nebraska. The symptoms of Rocky Mountain spotted fever are a dark rash and a fever appearing 5 to 10 days after a tick bite. It can lead to severe illness and hospitalization. It can be cured with antibiotics, but only if treatment begins immediately.

The Lone Star tick is a smaller tick found in southeastern Nebraska. It can be a carrier of ehrlichiosis. Lyme disease is another major concern with ticks. Between 1993 and 2007, there were 76 reported cases of Lyme disease in Nebraska. However, this has confused experts because none of the ticks in Nebraska carry Lyme disease. Although the issue remains unclear, these may have actually been mis-diagnosed cases of ehrlichiosis, a bacterial disease, which is very similar to Lyme disease and is carried by the Lone Star Tick. Symptoms generally appear five to 10 days after a tick bite and include fever, headache, fatigue, muscle and joint pain, nausea and occasionally a rash. When caught early, ehrlichiosis is treatable with antibiotics.

The Brown Dog Tick is another common tick in Nebraska. It is rarely a problem for humans and frequents kennels, sheds, barns and sheltered areas.

Keeping yard areas mowed is a great deterrent to ticks. Repellants play a key role in preventing tick bites and should always be applied to clothing and exposed skin when your travels take you into tall grass or forested areas. Repellants containing DEET work best. Insecticides can be applied to infected areas around the fringe of yards to help control ticks. Mowing and regularly trimming grassy and weedy areas that may harbor ticks is a more practical solution.

Wear light colored tight fitting long-sleeved shirts and pants when going in to tick-infested areas. Tuck pants in to boots to prevent ticks from climbing up the inside of pants. Wear light colors to make spotting ticks easier. When returning from outdoors, check the body for ticks, especially on the head, neck and waist. Removing ticks decreases the chance of disease because it takes several hours of feeding to transmit any viruses or bacteria.

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