

## 05-16-14 The Key to Avoiding Tick Borne Diseases

While most of us talk about Lyme disease, ticks carry an ever growing list of diseases to animals and humans. Some of them are debilitating and some can kill us. The diseases are well worth avoiding by avoiding the ticks.

One of the many challenges to avoiding ticks is that they are so tiny and so prevalent. They are active year round, as long as it is above freezing. That's right; even in the winter we can find a tick attached after a walk in the woods.

I was telling my son this on Mother's Day morning as we sat and chatted for a bit before heading out to the beach. I was around the corner getting ready to leave when he presented a tiny tick on his finger, very alive and crawling very quickly, as he asked, "What kind of tick is this?" I looked closely. It did not have the characteristic red outline of the female deer tick. "I believe that is a male deer tick. Where did you find it?" He told me he had just reached under his shirt and went to scratch his side when he felt something. He looked down and saw that tick crawling up his side.

Well, I was at least relieved that a moving tick means no bite and that means no disease. He had picked it up recently. I'm a mom, so, I had to ask this handsome, grown son who leads an active life outdoors, playing rugby, kayaking, bicycling and hiking. "When did you last take a shower?" He had to think about it! "Uh, let's see; Friday? Or was that Thursday?" I had to tell him that his chances of contracting a tick-borne disease such as Lyme, Babesiosis, Anaplasmosis or Rocky Mountain spotted fever would be about seventy five percent reduced by showering within a couple hours of outdoors activities. It will wash away the loose ones and help you to discover the attached ones. He might be grown up but he didn't mind receiving advice. That's a good thing for all of us at any age.

Washing clothing does not kill ticks. Ten minutes of high heat in the drier will, though.

Ticks cannot tolerate dry conditions. That is why we don't see them on the short grass in the sun but we do find them at the edge of the woods, in the woods, and under the leaf litter. If you are thinking of having your yard sprayed for ticks, keep this in mind and watch that company. Spraying into the air and up high into the trees might work on mosquitoes but not on ticks. The applicator should know how to spray vigorously under the leaves and the first few feet high at the edge of the woods to knock down any ticks.

What to spray? Well, that is your choice. You can hire a pesticide company but I am not sure how often that would have to be done. You can hire a company to spray botanicals known to repel and even kill mosquitoes and ticks. Plants such as garlic and rosemary are offensive to some insects. I don't do either. I just try to avoid and then look for the ticks.

I do spray my shoes, boots, socks, gloves, pants and jackets with permethrin. Permethrin is not intended for the skin but can be applied by liquid or spray into the fibers of cloth, where once it has dried, will remain, even through 5 to 7 cold water washes. This is a personal choice and one that I choose for when I am out at perc tests or gardening and hiking. It is highly recommended by the tick guy, Dr. Mather, entomologist at the University of Rhode Island. Check out his [tickencounter.org](http://tickencounter.org) website where he tells of spraying the whole family's footwear at the beginning of April, May, and June to kill ticks before they have a chance to climb up onto his family. For that is what ticks are hard wired to do: climb upward, once on their host.

Have you wondered why there is more and more disease spread by ticks? The answer is this: the density of the deer population. In fact, the deer are so critical to the three year life cycle of the deer tick, they are called the "keystone species". Put that keystone in, the structure is strong. Pull it out and everything falls apart.

Reducing the deer population to fewer than 20 per square mile would greatly reduce the chances of tick borne disease, according to many researchers. The bird "airline" providing transportation and the mice are not enough to keep the disease going without the large mammal host of the deer. I predict we will hear more on ways to reduce the deer population as the public health crisis of tick borne disease increases. Stay tuned on that!

Until the keystone species is sufficiently reduced, personal prevention is the best key: stay on the path, put clothing in the dryer, conduct tick checks ASAP, check and treat the pets, shower after outdoor activities and treat your clothing. Please become a Prevention Partner.

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