

Each year, around this time, children take a tour of our Town Hall. I hear the Town Clerk approaching, with explanations of various departments and instructions as to where to stand. I am so pleased she knows that when they arrive at my office, that the children are welcome. The Clerk tells the children that they may enter the Board of Health office and she explains that we oversee the construction of their septic system and we make sure that the restaurants are safe. Then she tells the class that I have something to show them.

At this time of year, what I have to show them is an identification card for ticks. I begin by asking them what insects do we have to be concerned with. The hands go up. The first responses include, "Lice" and "Fleas". It is then that I realize that lice and fleas would have had a far greater impact in most of their young lives than the ones I was thinking of, namely mosquitoes and ticks. That's OK. I tuck that information away in my head for some future use, happy that I did not hear of bed bugs, mites or pinworms and we proceed with the discussion of bugs.

They quickly come around to the ticks and we talk about Lyme Disease. I am pleased to see that many of the children do, in fact, know the difference between deer ticks and dog ticks, with deer ticks being the more problematic by carrying Lyme and other diseases. I emphasize, however, that other ticks carry disease also and that it is best to avoid them all. I encourage them to do a tick check each day when they have been outdoors and to apply the tick and flea repellent on their dogs and cats, because otherwise, their pets can bring the ticks into their home. If they find a tick on them, I want them to tell their parents. If the tick is stuck to their skin, I want them to get help from an adult to remove it with tweezers, as close to the skin as possible. I tell them to save the tick, in case the doctor wants to test it. If they ever see the "bulls eye" rash anywhere on their skin, I want them to go to the doctor's right away.

Then the stories begin. I love their stories. "My grandfather had a tick in his bellybutton." "Oh, I can believe that." I tell them. "Ticks move with verticality. That means that they keep climbing upward until something stops them and a nice cozy place like a bellybutton is a good reason to stop."

While this is a luscious time of the year, with the greening, the sprouting, the flowering and the joyous sounds of nature celebrating a time of rebirth, it is also the time for tick nymphs to drop off the deer and seek their first blood meal. People are outdoors more often in the spring and, so, they stand a higher chance of coming into contact with the blood seeking ticks, especially the tiny nymphs.

How tiny are they? They are about the size of a poppy seed. How many of these teeny tiny things are there? Well, they feed on mice and deer. Here's the math lesson: One cute little white-footed mouse can have 352 larvae feeding on it. Each lovely, statuesque deer can easily have at least 100 ticks on it, from any stage, larval, nymph or adult. Have you ever come across one of those flattened-out areas where the deer slept the night before? I have, and while I feel thrilled and privileged to know that these graceful creatures were so close, so recently, I also know that when the ticks are done feeding, each nest of several deer may have left behind several hundred ticks, all in one area, looking for their next "victim". That may be you or your dog, out for a walk.

While looking for their next blood meal, the ticks need to survive and they do so by hiding out in moist areas, such as in the shade or under leaves. They also enjoy most New England summers, especially August, for they thrive in its humidity.

As the official “Tick Control Awareness Day”, the first Saturday in June, approaches, keep these lessons in mind:

Conduct daily, thorough tick checks.

Protect yourself!

Protect your pet!

Protect your yard!

“DEET” is a repellent that works well to repel mosquitoes but is not effective with ticks. So, if looking for a way to repel and even kill ticks that crawl onto your clothing (You do wear long sleeves and put your socks over your pants, right?), do the following:

Buy some men’s white tube socks. Cut off the seam at the toe. Then, spray them to the point of soaking, with Permethrin. Let them dry and you then own a pair of tick killing protective leggings. Or you can buy an inexpensive kit from Sawyer.com and treat clothing in a similar fashion. Once dry, the skin does not absorb the pesticide and it can be washed in cold water and last about five weeks!

For more ideas on preventing Lyme Disease and on ticks in general, visit a fun, interactive website at [tickencounter.org](http://tickencounter.org)

And remember: Ticks suck. Don’t let them bite.

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