



Vilas County Public Health Department

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Be on the Lookout for Ticks

The prime season for tick-borne disease begins in May, when weather becomes warmer and deer ticks begin to be more active. Ticks live in wooded, brushy areas that provide food and cover for small animals and deer. Ticks are unable to jump or fly and usually attach to a host at ground level.

There are several different diseases that may be caused from tick bites. Some people can develop two or more of these diseases at the same time. Some of the more common tick borne diseases found in the Northwoods are:

Lyme Disease

Symptoms include a bulls-eye rash, fever, headache, chills, muscle pain and joint pain. The bulls-eye rash, one of the earliest symptoms, typically appears between 3 and 30 days after the tick bite. Not everyone with Lyme disease develops the rash.

Anaplasmosis and Erlichiosis

Symptoms include a sudden onset of a high fever (102 degrees or more), chills, severe headache and muscle aches. These symptoms appear between 1 and 3 weeks after an infectious tick bite. However, not all people have symptoms. Although people of all ages can get anaplasmosis, it is most severe in the elderly. If left untreated, it can result in organ failure and death.

Babesiosis

Symptoms include high fever, muscle aches, fatigue, headache and loss of appetite. Symptoms usually appear between 1 and 6 weeks after a deer tick bite, but may take longer in some individuals. Most people infected with the babesiosis parasite will have mild symptoms or no symptoms at all. People who are immune compromised may develop severe illness. Babesiosis can be fatal.

Steps to Protect Yourself from Tick Diseases

1. Know when you're in tick habitat—brushy, wooded areas—where you will need to take precautions.
2. Use a good tick repellent, such as a product containing 20 percent or more DEET, picaridin, or IR3535 and follow the manufacturer's instructions.

3. Wear clothes that will help to shield you from ticks. Long-sleeved shirts and long pants are best. Tuck your pants into the top of your socks or boots to create a “tick barrier.”
4. Use products that contain permethrin on clothing. Treat clothing and gear, such as boots, pants, socks and tents with products containing 0.5% permethrin. It remains protective through several washings.
5. When coming in from the outdoors, conduct a full-body tick check using a hand-held or full-length mirror to view all parts of your body. 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. This is an important step in preventing disease.
6. Remove the tick slowly and gently using a pair of tweezers. Folk remedies like Vaseline, nail polish remover, or matches are not safe or effective methods of tick removal.

Not all deer ticks carry the organisms that cause Lyme disease, human anaplasmosis/erlichiosis, or babesiosis. If an infected deer tick bites you, it needs to be attached at least 12-24 hours to transmit the human anaplasmosis bacteria and 24-48 hours to transmit the Lyme disease bacteria. Not every person who is infected with these organisms will develop symptoms.

If you do develop signs or symptoms of a tick-related illness after spending time in areas where deer ticks are found, you should seek medical attention right away. If you have any other questions please call the Vilas County Public Health Department at 715-479-3656.

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The mission of the Vilas County Public Health Department is to promote health, protect the environment, and prevent disease and injury.