

First Aid: Tick Bites

Most tick bites are harmless and don't need medical treatment. But some ticks (like the deer tick, wood tick, and others) can carry harmful germs that cause diseases like Rocky Mountain spotted fever and Lyme disease. The deer tick is tiny, no larger than a pencil point. Other ticks are larger and easier to find on the skin.

How Do I Remove a Tick?

It's important to remove a tick as soon as possible. Follow these steps:

1. Use tweezers to grasp the tick firmly at its head or mouth, next to the skin.
2. Pull firmly and steadily until the tick lets go of the skin. Do not twist the tick or rock it from side to side. If part of the tick stays in the skin, don't worry. It will eventually come out on its own.
3. Release the tick into a jar or zip-locked bag in case you want to have it identified later on.
4. Wash your hands and the site of the bite with soap and water.
5. Swab the bite site with alcohol.

Never use petroleum jelly or a hot match to kill and remove a tick. These methods don't get the tick off the skin, and can cause it to burrow deeper and release more saliva (which increases the chances of disease transmission).

What Are the Signs of Tick-Related Diseases?

Watch out for:

- a red bump ringed by an expanding red rash, which looks like a bull's-eye (Lyme disease)
- red dots on the ankles and wrists (Rocky Mountain spotted fever)
- flu-like symptoms such as fever, headache, fatigue, vomiting, and muscle and joint aches

When Should I Get Medical Care?

Call your health care provider if:

- The tick might have been on the skin for more than 24 hours.
- Part of the tick remains in the skin after attempted removal.
- A rash of any kind develops (especially a red-ringed bull's-eye rash or red dots on wrists and ankles).
- The bite area looks infected (increasing warmth, swelling, pain, or oozing pus).
- Symptoms like fever, headache, tiredness, stiff neck or back, or muscle or joint aches develop.

How Can I Protect My Kids From Ticks?

- After kids play outside, check their skin and hair — especially the scalp, behind the ears, around the neck, and under the arms.
- When playing in wooded areas, kids should wear long-sleeved shirts and pants and tuck pant legs into their socks.
- Use an insect repellent with at least 10% to 30% DEET for protection against bites and stings in kids older than 2 years, always carefully following the directions for application.
- Avoid tick-infested areas.

Removing a Tick

