

Newspaper article – Don't get ticked!

For 5/10/19

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It might have been a cool, wet spring so far, but it's prime time for many insects, spiders, and mites to become active once again. I saw my first mosquito of the year on a warm day in early April, and while mushroom hunting the last couple of weeks, I saw my first six-spotted tiger beetle of the year. All this activity means that we have to become more vigilant for one of my least favorite 8-legged creatures of all: the tick.

While getting outdoors during the warm months this year, it is important to recognize not only where ticks are most likely found but also what to do if you have been bitten by a tick. Ticks are found, very generally, in vegetation. You might think they drop out of trees in the woods (which is why you're supposed to wear a hat when walking in the woods, right?), but they are actually found in trees, shrubs, and plants on the forest floor. Even more commonly, they are found at forest edges in grasses and other tall brush. Using a behavior called "questing," ticks sit at the end of a branch or blade of grass, latching on with their back legs. Then they while extend their front legs into the air, where an unsuspecting human, dog, deer, or rodent might be traipsing by. Once a leg catches skin or fur, they are yanked off of the vegetation and free to move about its next potential host.

Ticks seek out a place to bite and latch on after their "questing" is completed. Typically, ticks do not transfer disease until they've been latched on for more than 24 hours. If you find a tick on yourself or a pet after being outdoors, the best course of action is to use a good pair of tweezers to remove it. To remove a tick safely, grasp with the tweezers directly on the mouth and pull directly away from the body. Using removal methods like heating with a lighter or swabbing on isopropyl alcohol may cause the tick to "spit up," which increases the likelihood of disease transfer. Once the tick is removed, place it in a plastic bag and freeze in the freezer. It's a good idea to keep the tick on hand in case you develop symptoms of tick-borne disease.

Dog ticks carry Rocky Mountain spotted fever (RMSF) and the tiny deer tick can transmit Lyme disease. Both of these ticks are commonly found in Indiana, and both of these diseases are serious conditions that require prompt treatment. For more information about these and other bug-borne diseases, the Centers for Disease Control and the Montgomery County Health Department are great resources! For more information on how to identify the type of tick you find outdoors, please refer to the Purdue Extension publication E-71-W.