



Ticks and your health | Information about tick bite risks and prevention

This factsheet provides important health advice and some basic precautions you can take to make sure you and your family avoid tick bites. Not all tick bites result in disease, but it is important you know how to effectively prevent tick bites and what to do if you do get bitten.

What are ticks and where can you find them?

Ticks are small, spider-like creatures that feed on the blood of animals, including people. Depending on its development stage, the size of a tick varies. Nymphs are about the size of a poppy seed, while adult ticks look more like tiny spiders.

Ticks can survive in many places, but prefer moist areas with dense vegetation or long grass. The species most commonly found on people is *Ixodes ricinus*, more commonly known as the sheep or deer tick. They are usually found in woodlands, grassland, moorland, heathland and some urban parks and gardens.

How do you come into contact with ticks?

Ticks don't jump or fly, but wait until an animal or person brushes past to climb on. They then bite to attach to the skin and start to feed on the blood. It may take several days to complete their blood meal, before they drop off. Ticks can be found throughout the year, but are most active between spring and autumn.



Main health risks

Ticks can transmit bacteria that cause diseases such as Lyme disease, which can lead to very serious conditions if left untreated. Symptoms of Lyme disease can include a circular rash, fatigue, and muscle and joint pain.

More serious conditions such as viral-like meningitis, facial palsy, nerve damage and arthritis can develop without treatment, so prevention and early detection are crucial. Lyme disease can be treated with a course of antibiotics.

A tick's size can vary, depending on its development stage, gender, species and whether it has fed recently

Perform a tick check

Make it a habit to check your clothes and your body regularly for ticks when you're outdoors, and again when you get home. Tick bites may not hurt and you don't always notice you've been bitten, so make sure you thoroughly check yourself, your children and your pets.

Ticks prefer warm, moist places on your body, especially the groin area, waist, arm pits, behind the knee and along hair lines, so look out for anything as tiny as a freckle or a speck of dirt. Take simple steps to avoid coming into contact with ticks, such as walking on clearly defined paths, avoiding dense vegetation and wearing light-coloured clothing so ticks are easier to spot and brush off. You can also use repellents such as DEET.

Help us record ticks

PHE monitors changes in tick distributions and investigates the drivers for change. Help us monitor ticks by participating in our nationwide surveillance via the Tick Recording Scheme (TRS). You can send in any ticks you come across, which helps us to update our knowledge of British tick species, their spread across the country and detect unusual species.

Visit our website for more information on how to take part and download a recording form to post with your specimens. For more information on British ticks or the TRS, please visit our website or email tick@phe.gov.uk

If you have been bitten

Being tick aware by knowing what ticks look like, where they can be found, and practicing prevention behaviours will help you to avoid tick bites. However, if you do get bitten, removing the tick quickly and correctly can help to reduce any potential risk.

- Remove the tick as soon as possible.
- The only safe way to remove a tick is to use a pair of fine-tipped tweezers, or a tick removal tool.
- Grasp the tick as close to the skin as possible. Pull upwards slowly and firmly, as mouthparts left in the skin can cause a local infection.
- Once removed, apply antiseptic to the bite area and keep an eye on it for several weeks for any changes.
- Contact your GP if you begin to feel unwell and remember to tell them you were bitten by a tick.

