

Nickname: Black-legged tick



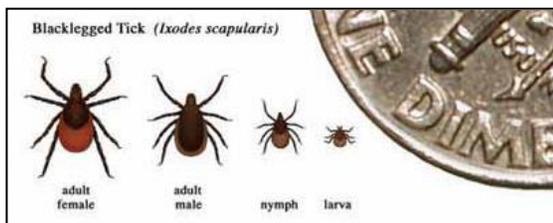
Adult Deer Tick

The **deer tick (*Ixodes scapularis*)** is also known as the black-legged tick. These ticks may transmit the organisms that cause anaplasmosis, babesiosis and Lyme disease. Ticks acquire bacteria and parasites by feeding on infected small animals, and then spread disease to other mammals while taking a blood meal. Both adult and young (nymph) deer ticks may bite humans and cause infection. However, most illness is acquired from nymphs because they are smaller, less noticeable and often not removed promptly.

## Where in the United States is the deer tick found?

The deer tick habitat extends from the southeastern corner of the U.S. to northern Maine and southern Canada. New England States, Mid-Atlantic States, and states in the upper Midwest have particularly high deer tick populations and a high prevalence of tickborne illnesses. The deer tick is the most commonly found tick in Vermont.

## What does the deer tick look like?



An adult female deer tick is about 3.5mm long and has a reddish-brown colored body with a dark brown plate behind its head. An adult male tick is slightly smaller than a female (2.5mm long) and entirely dark brown. The female deer tick increases in size after taking a blood meal, but the males stay the same size. Larvae and nymphs are much smaller than adults (0.8mm and 1.5mm, respectively) and consequently more difficult to spot and remove.

## What animals are commonly bitten by deer ticks?

Deer ticks feed on many different birds and mammals, but they feed only once each life stage. Larvae and nymphs usually take blood meals from birds and white-footed mice (*Peromyscus leucopus*). Adults prefer to feed on larger mammals such as white-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*). If given the opportunity, both nymphs and adults will also feed on other mammals, including dogs and people

## When are deer ticks most active?

Deer ticks have a two-year life cycle. Adult ticks are especially active in the spring and fall. Nymphs are most active in the summer. After feeding they molt into adults in the fall. New adult females may feed and mate in the fall or wait until the next spring to take a blood meal, mate and lay their eggs. The adults that wait until spring can become active during the winter if the temperature increases above 40° F.

## What is the ideal habitat of deer ticks?

Deer ticks are found in brushy or wooded areas, usually along forest edges and trails bordered by tall grass or weeds. Ticks tend to be found where their animal hosts live, which include pastures, meadows, marshes, and the edges of lakes and streams.

## What diseases can deer ticks carry?

The deer tick can transmit the organisms that cause Lyme disease, babesiosis, and anaplasmosis. Preventing tick bites is the best way to prevent illness.

## How do you prevent tick bites?

While outdoors:

- As much as possible, avoid high grass and bushy areas; stay on hiking trails.
- Wear long pants and long-sleeved shirts to minimize skin exposure to ticks.
- Tuck your pants into your socks to form a barrier to tick attachment.
- Wear light-colored clothing to help see ticks on your clothing.
- Check for ticks, looking particularly for what may look like nothing more than a new freckle or speck of dirt, and remove ticks promptly.
- Use an effective tick repellent on your skin or on your clothing. There are several repellents that are effective against ticks. For an up-to-date list of EPA registered products, see <http://cfpub.epa.gov/opprpref/insect/>. Repellents should not be used on infants under 2 months of age. Read the label carefully and use according to the recommendations.
- Permethrin is an insecticide that can be applied to clothing or gear. Wearing permethrin-treated clothing can be very effective at reducing your exposure to ticks.

After you come inside:

- Check your or your child's body for ticks, and remove them promptly. Pay special attention to the head, armpits, and groin area.
- Examine clothing and gear for ticks. Placing your clothes in a hot dryer for 60 minutes will kill any ticks that may be clinging to the fabric.
- Check your pets for ticks as well. Consult your veterinarian for advice on choosing effective tick repellents for your pets.
- Showering within a few hours of coming inside can also reduce your risk of getting Lyme disease.

## How do you remove ticks?

Try to remove the tick as soon as you discover it because prompt removal can prevent transmission of tickborne diseases.

### To safely remove ticks:

1. Use fine-tipped tweezers and firmly grasp the tick close to the skin. Avoid touching the tick with your bare hands.
2. With a steady motion, pull straight up until all parts of the tick are removed. Do not twist or jerk the tick. Do not be alarmed if the tick's mouthparts remain in the skin. Once the mouthparts are removed from the rest of the tick, it can no longer transmit disease-causing bacteria.

**DO NOT** use petroleum jelly, a hot match, nail polish, or other products to remove a tick. These methods are ineffective.

### Thoroughly wash your hands and the bite area

After removing the tick, wash your hands with soap and water or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available. Clean the tick bite with soap and water or use an antiseptic such as iodine scrub or rubbing alcohol.