

## How to Tick Check Your Child

By Professor Bugsbee

*I hope you are enjoying the great outdoors with your family this fall! To help you have lots of fun and safe experiences, here are some tips on keeping your kids safe and tick-free this autumn by conducting a thorough tick check. - Professor Bugsbee*

### **"QUESTING" FOR A MEAL**

Ticks typically climb onto vegetation at or above ankle-level, crawling out to the very tip of a leaf or grass blade and holding their front legs outstretched. This posture and behavior is called "questing," as they are waiting for a passing mammal to glom onto. Once on board, they look for a place where they will not be noticed or disturbed, let alone easily dislodged. They usually crawl upwards, giving you a fair amount of time (hours) do a tick check and remove them before they begin feeding.

### **THE TICK CHECK - WHERE TO LOOK**

#### **WASH BEHIND YOUR EARS...**

Showering immediately after being outdoors in tick habitat greatly reduces the risk of a tick embedding itself before it is discovered. Still, ticks have an uncanny ability to anchor themselves in places that are difficult, if not impossible, for you to see. One favorite spot is behind the ear, so be sure to check there. One mystery of a child with unexplained paralysis was solved when a physician found a tick behind the child's ear. Removal of the tick resulted in the complete recovery of the patient from "tick paralysis," one of many illnesses that can be caused by ticks.

#### **BEHIND YOUR KNEES, TOO**

Another place ticks like to go is behind your knee, where they can likewise escape notice. Even if you see one, you might mistake it for a bit of soil or grass seed or some other inanimate and innocuous object. Make sure to examine your child thoroughly during a tick check, investigating whether the "dirt" is what it seems.

#### **OTHER HIDING SPOTS**

Armpits, groin, and scalp are also favored by ticks. Since normal hosts for ticks are rodents and deer, it makes sense that ticks would head for the hairy parts of a human. Do a thorough tick check on your child's head after you've cleaned them up to make sure no ticks escaped the shower by nestling in their hair.

#### **TEENY TINY TICKS**

Remember that while adult ticks are not very large, young ticks are smaller still. You may need a magnifying glass to tell whether a given speck is dirt, a scab, or a tick. Take no chances, be thorough. Your child will be grateful to you later.

As always, it pays to take precautions before you go afield, as well as doing a thorough tick check upon your return. When headed into tick country, make sure your child wears pants, not shorts, and tuck the cuffs of the pants into their socks for added security. Choose light-colored clothing, as this lets you see a climbing tick easier than dark clothing. Outdoor garments and gear treated with permethrin may discourage ticks even more. Use insect repellents like Ben's® with 10-30% DEET as the active ingredient.

# Ticks in Autumn?

BY ERIC R. EATON

*Leaves are beginning to turn and Halloween is just around the corner. Who knew that fall is also a time when ticks are active? The adult Blacklegged Tick or "deer tick," Ixodes scapularis, feeds during fall, warm winter days, and early spring. This tick is a major vector (carrier) of Lyme Disease.*

## **Cold Weather Doesn't Faze Ticks**

While most ticks are absent during the colder months, it does not mean they die. They simply go into diapause, a period of inactivity characterized by a low metabolic rate, just high enough to keep them alive. Adults of the Blacklegged Tick take advantage of reduced competition from other tick species at this time. They are a threat whenever temperatures are above freezing and the ground is snow- and ice-free. Among potential targets are:

- Dogs
- Cats
- Horses
- Humans

## **The Odds of Contracting Lyme Disease**

About forty to sixty percent (40-60%) of Blacklegged Ticks harbor the bacteria that causes Lyme Disease. You can improve your odds of *not* contracting *any* tick borne illness by:

- Wearing light-colored clothing on which crawling ticks are easy to see.
- Using permethrin repellents like Ben's® Clothing and Gear Continuous Spray.
- Using an insect repellent (even when in the backyard) like [Natrapel](#), a DEET-free insect repellent to both clothes and skin; or Ben's Tick and Insect Repellent (available in 30 and 100 percent DEET offerings).
- Inspecting yourself, family members, and pets after they have been outdoors.
- Removing attached ticks before 48 hours have elapsed, preferably sooner.

## **Outdoorsmen (Women AND Children) Beware**

White-tailed Deer are indeed an important host of adult Blacklegged Ticks, so hunters should be especially careful. Still, most people contract Lyme Disease between April and August, when humans are most active outdoors, and when it is the harder-to-detect tick larvae and nymphs that are feeding.

How to Tick Check Your Child - see page 3.