

# Pa. is a leader in Lyme disease: Expert gives tick-prevention tips

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By Kulsoom Khan - For Times Leader





Nicole Chinnici, director of East Stroudsburg University's Northeast Wildlife DNA Laboratory, gives a presentation Tuesday at Nescopeck State Park on how to prevent tick bites and Lyme disease. - Kulsoom Khan | For Times Leader

BUTLER TWP. — As the weather improves and more people spend more time outdoors, they become more susceptible to tick-borne diseases like Lyme disease, an expert explained Tuesday.

According to the state **Department of Health**, Pennsylvania has led the nation in confirmed cases of Lyme disease for the past several years. Researchers from the **Department of Environmental Protection** also found evidence of deer ticks in all 67 counties.

“Out of all the cases, we make up 33 percent of the total Lyme disease cases in the United States, so we have a really big issue with Lyme disease in Pennsylvania,” said Nicole Chinnici, director of East Stroudsburg University’s Northeast Wildlife DNA Laboratory. The facility is currently the largest tick-testing research site in the state.

Lyme disease is caused by the bacterium *Borrelia burgdorferi* and is often transmitted through the bite of an infected black legged tick, also known as a deer tick. According to data collected by the **Department of Health’s Bureau of Communicable Diseases**, 168 cases of Lyme disease were found in Luzerne County in 2016.

### Protection tips

A presentation was held Tuesday evening at Nescopeck State Park on how to prevent tick bites and Lyme disease.

Chinnici said ticks usually live in areas with lots of wildlife or in tall grass, forest edges, the bases of trees, thick brush, and anywhere it is shaded with high humidity.

To avoid ticks:

- Spray skin with insect repellent.

- Spray socks, shoes, and other clothing as well as camping gear, picnic blankets, and backpacks with Permethrin, a man-made chemical produced by the chrysanthemum flower. It repels and kills ticks upon contact, but do not let it touch the skin.

- Wear light-colored clothing to see ticks more easily.

- Wear a hat, long sleeves, and enclosed shoes.

After spending time in an area where ticks are common, Chinnici advised following a routine to ensure that no ticks are brought inside the home:

- Remove clothes and shoes immediately.

- Put clothes in dryer in high heat for at least 10 minutes, because the high temperature will kill any ticks clinging to clothing

- Shower within two hours of potential exposure to wash off any loose ticks, especially in the hair.

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## Tick Bites and Lyme Disease

Summer is here, weather is heating up, and ticks are out! Ticks are very small (as you see in the illustrations below), but thirsty for blood! Some tick-bites can result in Lyme disease, which is a chronic and debilitating condition. If untreated, symptoms may include loss of the ability to move one or both sides of the face, joint pains, and severe headaches with neck stiffness, or heart palpitations. This safety talk includes information about ticks, steps to take to help prevent tick bites, symptoms of Lyme disease, and what to do if bitten by a tick.



Blacklegged tick (*Ixodes scapularis*)



### Where do ticks hang out?

Ticks are very small. They live in the woods, brush, bushes, and high grass. They are especially common at the edges of wooded areas. They can also be found in the yards of urban homes.

### How to prevent of Tick bites?

People may be exposed to ticks and tick-bites while working outside or walking in wooded areas. The most common methods of protection from tick bites include:

- 1) Wearing long sleeves, long pants, and long socks and keeping pants tucked into socks/boots will help keep ticks off of your body.
- 2) Using light-colored clothing will make it easier to spot ticks that have latched on in search of a meal.
- 3) Using insect repellent with 20% - 30% DEET on exposed skin and clothing could prevent tick bites.
- 4) Using permethrin on clothing helps prevent bites. Permethrin kills ticks on contact! One application of 0.5% permethrin to pants, socks, and shoes typically stays effective through several washings.

**DO NOT APPLY PERMETHRIN DIRECTLY TO SKIN.**



## What are the symptoms of Lyme disease?

Lyme disease is transmitted to humans by the bite of an infected blacklegged tick (*Ixodes scapularis*), commonly referred to as a deer tick. Usually, the tick must be attached for 36 to 48 hours before the bacteria can spread. The most commonly noted symptom of Lyme disease is the red rash in the form of a bullseye (illustrated here). In most cases, this rash appears within 3 to 30 days (on average, in about 7 days). It begins at the site of the tick bite and gradually expands. It isn't itchy or painful. Within a few hours to a few days after the rash appears, flu-like symptoms including fever, headache, fatigue, and muscle and joint aches may also occur. Other symptoms include sweating, swollen glands, chills, and a sore throat.

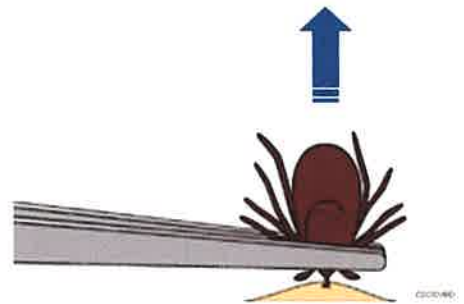


Occasionally, people develop shooting pains or tingling in their arms and legs. Months to years later, some people may have repeated episodes of joint pain and swelling. Despite appropriate treatment, about 10 to 20 percent of people develop joint pain, memory problems, and fatigue for at least six months.

## What to do if a tick is found?

An attached tick feels like a small scab. Ticks often hide in head or pubic hair, on the neck, and in or behind the ear. Using a comb with fine teeth will help find adult ticks in the scalp and hair. Ticks also crawl into the underarms, between the legs, behind the knees, and onto the lower legs and arms. After engaging in activities in areas where ticks tend to live, careful inspection of your body is encouraged so that ticks can be found and removed promptly.

1. An embedded tick should be removed as quickly as possible by using tweezers, rubber gloves, or even leaves to provide grip.
2. Gently pull the tick straight up. Do not crush the body or leave the head intact in the wound. Ticks can continue to live and transmit disease even after being dismembered.
3. If possible, save the tick on a wet paper towel and store it in a closed container. Remember or document the date that the bite occurred.



4. If Lyme disease is suspected (see symptoms above), take the tick to the doctor and inform the physician of the symptoms and bite date. This will assist in pin-pointing whether or not you have been infected.