Tick season is here, be aware!

Tick habitat could be right outside your door

Generally, tick populations tend to be higher in elevation, in wooded and grassy areas where the creatures they feed on live and roam, including deer, rabbits, birds, lizards, squirrels, mice, and other rodents. The following are a few common areas to keep a close eye out for ticks:

- Wood piles, which can often harbor mice and other rodents
- High grassy areas
- Wooden areas
- Stone walls and other features that may retain moisture
- Leaf piles and litter
- Fallen and low-hanging branches
- Overgrown shrubs
- Bird feeders (because they can invite other tick-attracting wildlife)

Ticks can be active year round

Although some tick species prefer warmer temperatures and are more active during spring and summer months, others remain active year round. Adult black-legged ticks, also known as deer ticks, for example, are in fact most active from fall to spring, often after the first frost.

Most prevalent Ticks in Western Massachusetts

Black-legged Ticks
Black-legged ticks, sometimes called deer ticks, are responsible for spreading Lyme disease, babesiosis, anaplasmosis, Borrelia miyamotoi, and Powassan virus. Both nymph (young) and adult black-legged ticks will bite Humans.
**Dog Ticks**
Dog ticks are responsible for spreading *Rocky Mountain spotted fever* and certain types of *tularemia*. In general, only the adult dog tick will bite humans.

**Lone Star Ticks**
Lone star ticks are not a significant source of human illness in Massachusetts at this time but are capable of spreading tularemia, ehrlichiosis and southern tick-associated rash illness (STARI).

**Tick diseases they can spread:**

**Blacklegged (“deer”) tick**
- *Anaplasmosis*
- *Babesiosis*
- *Borrelia miyamotoi disease*
- *Lyme disease*
- *Powassan virus disease*

**American Dog Tick**
- *Rocky Mountain spotted fever*
- *Tularemia*

**Lone Star Tick**
- *Ehrlichia chaffeensis*
- *Tularemia*
Preventing tick bites

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Before You Go Outdoors

- **Know where to expect ticks.** Ticks live in grassy, brushy, or wooded areas, or even on animals. Spending time outside walking your dog, camping, gardening, or hunting could bring you in close contact with ticks. Many people get ticks in their own yard or neighborhood.
- **Treat clothing and gear** with products containing 0.5% permethrin. Permethrin can be used to treat boots, clothing and camping gear and remain protective through several washings.
- **Use Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)-registered insect repellents** containing DEET, picaridin, IR3535, Oil of Lemon Eucalyptus (OLE), para-menthane-diol (PMD), or 2-undecanone. **Do not use products containing OLE or PMD on children under 3 years old.**
- **Avoid Contact with Ticks**
  - Avoid wooded and brushy areas with high grass and leaf litter.
  - Walk in the center of trails.

After You Come Indoors

**Check your clothing for ticks.** Ticks may be carried into the house on clothing. Any ticks that are found should be removed. Tumble dry clothes in a dryer on high heat for 10 minutes to kill ticks on dry clothing after you come indoors.

**Examine gear and pets.** Ticks can ride into the home on clothing and pets, then attach to a person later, so carefully examine pets, coats, and daypacks.

**Shower soon after being outdoors.** Showering within two hours of coming indoors has been shown to reduce your risk of getting Lyme disease and may be effective in reducing the risk of other tick-borne diseases.

**Check your body for ticks after being outdoors.** Conduct a full body check upon return from potentially tick-infested areas, including your own backyard. Check these parts of your body and your child’s body for ticks:

- Under the arms
- In and around the ears
- Inside belly button
- Back of the knees
- In and around the hair
- Between the legs
- Around the waist
Tick Removal

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If you find a tick attached to your skin, there’s no need to panic—the key is to remove the tick as soon as possible. There are several tick removal devices on the market, but a plain set of fine-tipped tweezers work very well.

How to remove a tick

1. Use fine-tipped tweezers to grasp the tick as close to the skin’s surface as possible.
2. Pull upward with steady, even pressure. Don’t twist or jerk the tick; this can cause the mouth-parts to break off and remain in the skin. If this happens, remove the mouth-parts with tweezers. If you are unable to remove the mouth easily with clean tweezers, leave it alone and let the skin heal.
3. After removing the tick, thoroughly clean the bite area and your hands with rubbing alcohol or soap and water.
4. Never crush a tick with your fingers. Dispose of a live tick by putting it in alcohol, placing it in a sealed bag/container, wrapping it tightly in tape, or flushing it down the toilet.

Follow-up

If you develop a rash or fever within several weeks of removing a tick, see your doctor. Be sure to tell the doctor about your recent tick bite, when the bite occurred, and where you most likely acquired the tick.

Sources:  
Mass.gov

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention