

Ticks and Lyme disease in Scotland

What are ticks?

Ticks are small, spider-like creatures which feed on the blood of birds and mammals, including humans. Their size varies between 1mm to 1cm long and they have either six or eight legs.

They can be found anywhere there is wildlife, usually in woodland and moorland areas, and are particularly common between March and October.

The most common tick in Scotland is the sheep or deer tick. They do not fly or jump but climb on to animals or humans as they brush past.

Tick bites are not painful. If ticks are not removed, however, they will feed for several days before dropping off.



What diseases do ticks carry?

In Scotland, the most common disease ticks transmit is Lyme disease (also known as Lyme borreliosis). They also carry other diseases but these mainly affect animals. In other parts of the world, ticks can spread different diseases, some of which can cause serious illness in both humans and animals.

How can I prevent being bitten by a tick?

Prevention wherever possible is the best method to avoid ticks so please remember to adopt these easy habits when out and about in the countryside or anywhere near wildlife:

- Cover up as much skin as you can as ticks will find it more difficult to bite you. Wear long trousers tucked in to socks and long sleeves. Light-coloured clothing may help you to see ticks more easily.
- Using an insect repellent containing the ingredient DEET to deter ticks also helps.
- Check clothing for ticks regularly and brush off any you do find.
- As well as examining yourself for ticks, remember to check everyone else you are with – especially any younger members of your group and particularly around hairlines.



What should I do if I am bitten?

Ticks can bite anywhere on the body, often in hidden places such as skin folds in adults and the head, neck and behind the ears in children. It is quite possible for an adult or child to have several ticks at once in different parts of the body.

If a tick has attached itself to you, then you need to remove it as soon as possible.

This is best done using one of these methods:

- Use a plastic tick removal device that looks like either a small claw hammer or credit card. These are available in many outdoor stores, pharmacies and rural shops. It's a good idea to have these devices handy in first aid kits, back packs and car glove boxes.
- Use fine-tipped tweezers held parallel to the skin to lift the tick off.
- As a last resort, fingernails can be used by holding the tick close to the skin and pulling steadily.

It is important to try not to squeeze the body of the tick when removing it so avoid heavier tweezers or blunt-nosed instruments.

While attached to the skin, do not cover the tick with oils, lotions or chemicals and do not burn it as none of these methods make the removal any easier.

A rash which spreads out from the bite could be a sign of Lyme disease. This can be easily treated with antibiotics and it is better to do so as quickly as possible. Remember to advise your GP that you have been bitten by a tick.

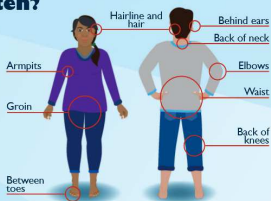
After the tick has been removed, clean the area with an antiseptic wipe or wash the area well with soap and water. If the tick's mouthparts break off in the skin and cannot be removed, these may cause local irritation but should fall out naturally in time.

It's a good idea to take a picture of the tick or the rash around the tick bite so you can show your GP.

What do I do next?

Keep an eye on anywhere you have been bitten by a tick. There is no need to consult your GP if you have been bitten and have no symptoms. However, if you develop a rash or experience flu-like symptoms after being bitten, then you should see your GP.

Further information is available at nhsinform.scot/bugs-and-germs



Tick twister



Tick card



Fine-tipped tweezers

