

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Contact: Jon Ebel, Public Information Officer, DPHHS, (406) 444-0936
Chuck Council, Communications Specialist, DPHHS, (406) 444-4391

DPHHS offers advice to prevent tick bites

As Montanans look to enjoy the great outdoors this spring and summer, Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services (DPHHS) and local public health officials urge everyone to follow a few simple steps to prevent tick bites and their illnesses: Limit, repel, and inspect.

On average, state public health officials receive an average of eight tick-borne illness reports every year, including Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever, Tularemia, Colorado Tick Fever and Tickborne Relapsing Fever.

Other reported tick-borne illnesses, believed to be acquired out of state, include Lyme disease, Ehrlichiosis, and Babesiosis. All of these diseases can cause severe illness.

“The best defense against tick-borne illnesses is by spraying your legs, ankles, pants, socks, and shoes with insect repellent,” said Jim Murphy of the DPHHS Public Health and Safety Division.

Public health officials emphasize a 3-step approach to prevent tick bites:

LIMIT: Ticks live in wooded, brushy, or grassy areas so walk in the center of trails and mow your property where you and your pets spend time.

REPEL: Wear long, light-colored pants and socks to spot ticks more easily and use insect repellents. Those repellents containing up to 30 percent DEET can be used on the skin or clothing. Repellents with lower DEET concentrations might need to be applied more frequently. Repellents containing Permethrin can be used on clothing, but not on skin. One application to pants, socks, and shoes may be effective through several washings.

INSPECT: Check your skin carefully for ticks after returning from outdoor activities especially if you were in wooded, brushy, or grassy areas. Common hiding places for ticks are the scalp, beard, back of the knees, armpits, groin, back of the neck, and behind the ears. De-ticking clothing is best done by throwing clothes into a drier on high for 10 minutes, even before washing.

The most common symptoms of tick-borne infections include fever and chills, aches and pains, rash, and fever of varying degrees. Although easily treated with antibiotics, these diseases can be difficult for physicians to diagnose. Early recognition and treatment of the infection decreases the risk of serious complications.

“See your doctor immediately if you have been bitten by a tick and experience symptoms,” Murphy said.

If a tick is found and is attached, follow these steps to safely remove the tick.

1. Use fine-tipped, “pointy” 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, an iodine scrub, or soap and water.

Do not use folklore remedies such as “painting” the tick with nail polish or petroleum jelly, or using heat to make the tick detach from the skin. These methods are not recommended and may cause the tick to burrow deeper into the skin.

For more information about tick-borne illnesses, protection and detection efforts, visit the DPHHS website at <http://www.dphhs.mt.gov>.