

Time-Out for Ticks!

Ticks are arachnids (related to spiders) that feed on the blood of animals. They are found throughout Utah, commonly in the foothills and at higher elevations and can occur from early spring to late fall, but are less common during the hottest summer months. Rocky Mountain wood tick (*Dermacentor andersoni*) is the most common tick associated with people and pets in the state. The western black-legged tick (*Ixodes pacificus*) and winter tick (*D. albipictus*) can also be encountered, but much less frequently. In Utah, ticks are usually found on grasses, low plants, and sage brush, waiting to attach to a host. Ticks do not jump or fly to find hosts. Many species of ticks occur in Utah, but most live in close association with their hosts and would never encounter humans. Ticks are important because pathogens (bacteria, viruses or protozoa) can be transmitted when infected ticks feed on humans.

In Utah, the Rocky Mountain wood tick can transmit Colorado tick fever (virus), tularemia (bacteria) and Rocky Mountain spotted fever (bacteria), or cause tick paralysis (physiological). Western black-legged ticks not commonly encountered and are not known to transmit Lyme disease in Utah (but do in Pacific Coast states). Western black-legged ticks are closely associated with gamble oak habitat in Utah south of Tooele County and west of I-15. Contact your medical provider with questions about symptoms and treatments for tick-borne illness.

There are also ticks called soft ticks and feed rapidly on humans, like bed bugs do, instead of attaching. Soft ticks are most commonly encountered in old cabins and abandon structures that have nesting sites for rodent hosts. In UT, soft ticks can transmit tick-borne relapsing fever. Soft ticks are also infrequently encountered.



Above:
Female Western Black-Legged Tick (photo courtesy of R. Davis, Utah State University)



Above:
Female Rocky Mountain wood tick (photo courtesy of R. Davis, Utah State University)



Above:
Male Rocky Mountain wood tick (photo courtesy of R. Davis, Utah State University)

Did You Know?

- The Rocky Mountain wood tick typically takes 12 to 24 hours to start feeding.
- Ticks are usually found from ground level to three feet above the ground.
- A tick uses carbon dioxide, scent, body heat and other stimuli to find a host.
- Avoid tick attachment by performing a tick check after leaving tick habitat.





Left:
Stages of tick engorgement
(photo courtesy of R. Davis,
Utah State University)



Right:
Western Black-Legged
Tick male (photo courtesy
fo R. Davis, Utah State
University)



Above:
Illustration of American dog tick bite.
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Managing Ticks with Integrated Pest Management

- Keep ticks off by wearing protective clothing. White or light colored long pants, long-sleeved shirts and other clothing can help exclude ticks or keep them from attaching to the skin. Insect repellent also can be used.
- Always conduct a thorough "tick check" after walking through areas where ticks might be present. Carefully look for and remove any ticks you may have picked up. Ticks take several hours to settle and begin feeding. This gives you time to find and remove them.
- If you find a tick, remove it by grasping it with tweezers, as close to the skin as possible. Pull upward and don't twist or jerk the tick. Never squeeze the body of the tick. After removing, thoroughly clean the bite area and your hands with rubbing alcohol or soap and water. Save the tick in rubbing alcohol in case symptoms develop. All other tick removal methods are not recommended.
- Two insect repellants are effective - products with permethrin, which is used only to treat clothing, and DEET, which is applied to exposed skin or clothing. Take precautions when using any insecticide. Do not apply DEET to hands or other areas that may come into contact with the mouth. After use, wash or bathe treated areas.
- If you develop a rash or fever within days to weeks of removing a tick, see your doctor. Be sure and tell the doctor about your recent tick bite, when the bite occurred, and where you most likely acquired the tick.

For more info, check out:

Colorado Ticks and Tick-Borne Diseases, W.S. Cranshaw and F.B Peairs, Colorado State University Extension no. 4.493.

<http://www.ext.colostate.edu/pubs/insect/05593.html>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:

www.cdc.gov