

Your Health Matters

PREVENTING TICKBORNE ILLNESS

During this time of the year, when we spend more time outdoors, it is common to come home carrying ticks. Ticks live in the grass and brush, and feed on the blood of humans and animals. When you walk or play outdoors, ticks can brush off the grass onto your skin.

Ticks usually bite humans in warm places, such as the underarms, sock-line, behind the ears, under tight-fitting clothing and in the hair. Their saliva and their blood can pass diseases on to you – diseases like Rocky Mountain spotted fever, ehrlichiosis, tularemia and lyme-like disease.

Tickborne diseases are more likely to occur if a tick has been feeding on you for two or more days. It is important to check for ticks when you return indoors and remove ticks as soon as you find them.

To remove a tick, use tweezers to grasp the tick as closely to your skin as possible. Pull the tick from your skin with steady pressure, rather than twisting or jerking. Wash your hands and the bite site with soap and water after removing the tick.

Label a sealable sandwich bag with the date, place the tick inside, and keep it in your freezer for 2-3 weeks in case you develop complications. Watch for symptoms such as a sudden fever, muscle pain or headache followed by a rash. See your health care provider immediately if these symptoms develop.

The most effective way to prevent tickborne disease is to limit your exposure to ticks. Avoid the moist, cool places under ground cover, brush or leaves where they live. Eliminate tick habitat in your yard by clearing away brush, litter and wood piles. Prune tree branches to let sunlight in, and keep your grass mowed short. When you hike or spend extended time outdoors, stay on trails and out of the brush. Wear light-colored clothing so ticks are easy to see. Wear long pants, socks and shoes, and tuck your pants into your socks. Also apply an insect repellent that contains DEET. Follow the manufacturer's instructions and wash the repellent off your skin when you return indoors.

A tick bite can cause mild symptoms you can treat at home, or it can lead to severe infections that require hospitalization. Be vigilant to avoid tick bites when you can and remove ticks from your skin as soon as possible if you are bitten.

The Montgomery County Health Department loves taking care of your family, and works every day to protect, promote and improve health in our community. To learn more, call 573-564-2495 or visit us online at www.montgomerycountyhealth.org or on Facebook or Twitter @healthymoco. ■



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