

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF AGAINST TICKS

If you walk in Kendal's woods and meadows – or, indeed, if you walk in natural areas anywhere in most parts of the U.S. – you need to recognize that there are ticks out there and that tick bites can transmit Lyme disease and other types of infections. That's not a good reason to avoid natural areas, however, any more than we avoid getting into motor vehicles because motor vehicle accidents happen. There are a few easy steps you can take to protect yourself from ticks and other insects – steps that will hugely reduce any risk of tick transmitted infections. Here are the steps, starting with basics.

(1) Ticks cannot fly or jump. They hang around leaf litter, grasses, tree branches and brush waiting to snag onto passers by with their front legs. Here at Kendal our staff and our Trails Team keep our trails quite clear. If you stay to the center of most of our woods trails, you will mostly be walking on bare earth. Meadows trails are mowed regularly by the staff. Avoiding contact with overgrown areas greatly lessens the chance that a tick can latch onto you.

(2) Wear clothing that covers most exposed body areas. It's a good idea to wear long pants and many people tuck the bottoms of their pants into their socks.

(3) Use effective insect repellants and insect repellant clothing. Insect repellants containing relatively high concentrations of Deet (25% - 30%) or Picaridin (20%) are effective tick repellants when applied to exposed skin. Neither should be used in lower concentrations and both should be reapplied periodically if you will be in the woods for long periods of time. Neither of these repellants is generally applied to clothing and should be supplemented with clothing that's been treated with permethrin.

Permethrin is an extremely effective insecticide used on clothing, shoes, backpacks and similar outdoor equipment. Permethrin is a synthesized version of pyrethrum, a traditional insecticide made from certain types of chrysanthemum flowers. Permethrin does not just repel ticks (and all other types of insects); it kills them. Permethrin is odorless and colorless and does not stain any type of fabric. When used as directed, it is not toxic to humans or dogs. (It is toxic to aquatic life and in its liquid form, until it has dried on clothing, it's toxic to cats.) For more about permethrin, check it out in various sites on the web – for example, in the University of Rhode Island's site at <https://web.uri.edu/tickencounter/prevention/protect-yourself/>.

Permethrin should not be applied directly to your skin. It won't hurt you but it rapidly uses its effectiveness upon reacting to other skin substances. Instead, Permethrin is used to treat clothing in two ways.

First, you can buy permethrin treated pants, shirts and other clothing that has been treated in a way that bonds permethrin to the fabric so that it will remain effective through a claimed 70 washings. Such treated clothing can be purchased at outdoor stores or through the web. The U.S. military has been reported to use permethrin treated materials for all of its outdoor clothing. There are various suppliers of

permethrin treated clothing. One of the main suppliers is Insect Shield, www.insectshield.com.

Second, you can buy permethrin in concentrations designed for clothing treatment in spray cans or (more economically) in pump spray containers. A major brand is Sawyer. It's available this way through the web through Amazon or (when in stock) at stores such as Home Depot. You use it by spraying the external areas of all of your clothing that you will wear in the natural areas and then letting the clothing fully dry. All of your clothing means everything excluding underwear, including not just shirts and pants but also your hats, shoes, socks, and backpacks. Used in this way, the effectiveness of permethrin lasts up to six weeks and through up to six washings.

I have been using permethrin-treated clothing (plus Deet on exposed skin areas) for the past eight tick seasons. During that time, I have usually been out on our trails several times a week and have not yet found a tick on my body or clothing. Another Kendal resident, who was a very active member of the Chester County Hiking Club, reported that he used permethrin for more than ten years and did not find a tick during that time. Prior to that, he had contracted Lyme disease twice.

4. Check yourself for ticks. Even if you keep to the trails and use insect repellents, always do a thorough self-examination for ticks when you get home. Have your spouse or partner check your backside, or use a hand mirror so as to reflect the large bathroom mirror over your sink. In the unlikely event that you do discover an attached tick, pull it off slowly and carefully by grabbing it with tweezers as close to the skin as possible.

Not all ticks carry Lyme disease and even an infected tick must attach itself to you in order to transmit the disease. If you should find a tick crawling on you – that is, before it has had a chance to attach itself – that tick has had no chance of passing on the disease. If a tick does attach itself to you, remove it with tweezers as soon as you find it. Once an infected tick has attached itself, the risk of its transmitting Lyme disease increases dramatically with the duration of attachment. The U.S. Center for Disease Control website states that in most cases a tick must be attached 36 to 48 hours in order to transmit the disease. Other sites state that only a 24 hour attachment is necessary. Still other authorities assert that, in rare cases, even much briefer attachments permit a tick to transmit other kinds of diseases – so it's good practice to consult our Kendal clinic anytime a tick has attached itself to you.

And of course, consult your health provider if you display any symptoms of illness after you have found a tick attached to your body. While the notorious “bull's eye rash” of Lyme disease may or may not appear, any flu-like symptoms after you have had a tick attachment – such as fever, headache, chills, body aches, headache, vomiting — should be reported to your doctor or other health provider. Caught at an early stage, Lyme disease can be treated very effectively with antibiotics.

Kendal's woods and meadows are among its greatest assets. You can enjoy using them as much as you're able if you take these reasonable precautions to avoid ticks.

-- Art Goodkind, July 21-2022